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THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSOLATION;

OR, THE

PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST

TO ALL WHO BELIEVE.

BY JOHN THORNTON.

"To you that believe he is precious."—1 Pet. ii. 7.

"The central point in all revealed truth is Christ crucified; because the truth of the blessed God the centre to which all the prophecies and the law of Moses pointed, and whence all the illuminations of Providence and redeeming mercy proceed."—The Connexion.

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THE

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and wit employed its ridicule, against the sacred cause in which confessors and martyrs have nobly dared to die. Nor have there been wanting men of distinguished ability and zeal, to unravel the sophistries, and confute the objections of infidelity. Such writers as Campbell, Beattie, Paley, and Watson, have doubtless contributed, in no small degree, to confirm the minds of many in the belief of Divine revelation. But, while the out-works of our holy religion are so triumphantly defended, great numbers, it is to be feared, overlook its interior excellency! Hence it comes to pass, that while there is a general acquaintance with

the leading facts and moral precepts of the Gospel, its peculiar doctrines are unacknowledged, or, which is worse, branded with opprobrious epithets, and represented as the absurd opinions of some despised party of enthusiasts. The grand topic of the Christian dispensation is, salvation through the blood of Christ. The doctrines, which unfold this all-important subject, are not calculated to feed the pride of man, but to subdue and eradicate it. They point out the insufficiency and danger of every flimsy refuge of self-righteousness, and the necessity of an entire dependence on the grace of God, that no flesh should glory in his pre-

sence. Every one, who sincerely loves these doctrines, must earnestly desire to spread them. With this object in view, as the chief motive of his undertaking, the author has been induced to publish the following pages. His aim has not been elegance, but perspicuity of language. The reader of refined taste may discover many defects; but if the subject be felt of great importance, such defects will, he trusts, be covered with the veil of candour, or at least be considered as comparatively of little consequence. If, under the blessing of God, this little work should be the means of bringing one benighted, wandering soul to experience the ex-

cellency and value of the knowledge of Christ, or of confirming and consoling any that have already believed through grace, he will deem his feeble endeavours amply rewarded. It is the sincere wish, and ardent prayer of his heart, that every attempt to diffuse the Gospel and its blessings may be crowned with success by the great Head of the Church.

THE

CHRISTIAN'S CONSOLATION.

CHAP. I.

ON THE PERFECTIONS AND EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST.

IT is not easy fully to describe the manifold advantages to be derived from the sacred Scriptures. The most important and interesting events in history, the purest and sublimest precepts in morality, and the most just and striking delineations of character, are found in the books of the Old and New Testament. But the chief excellency of the inspired volume is its bright display of Immanuel. There, his distinguishing titles, his various and important offices, his free abounding grace, and his glorious everlasting kingdom, are amply unfolded in the plainest language, and beautifully exhibited under the most expressive imagery. Hence we see the propriety and force of his own address to the Jews: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal

life; and they are they which testify of me." To him give all the prophets witness; and while they foretold his incarnation, his sufferings, and the glory that should follow, they were wrapt up in devout admiration and praise. The lively interest, which they felt in this pleasing theme, prompted them to pursue their inquiries with the warmest zeal, and with unwearied assiduity, 1 Pet. i, 10, 11. "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you," &c. As soon as the apostles were enlightened to know, and honoured with a commission to make known the adorable Saviour and his Gospel to all nations, they accounted every thing else comparatively as dross. Their characters were then raised to such a degree of dignity, decision, heroic fortitude, and exemplary holiness, that even their enemies were often put to silence and filled with astonishment. Nor are beings of the highest order in the heavenly world indifferent to the great mystery of Redemption; for, as Peter says, "Into these things the angels desire to look."

Whatever other advantages we may derive from the Scriptures, let us never forget that their grand design is to make us wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. "To take Christ from the Bible," says an old writer, "would be

like blotting the sun from the firmament." It will avail nothing what discoveries we make, if we find not, to our present and eternal welfare, Him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. The key of knowledge will be of little use, unless it open to us the unsearchable riches of Christ.—"These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name," John xx, 31.

I shall proceed to take a general view of the Perfections and Excellencies of Christ. A great number of powerful arguments might be introduced to prove his divinity; but I shall now merely glance on the names which he bears, the works which he performs, and the honours which he receives.

In the Scriptures Christ is called the Mighty God, Isa. ix, 6.; Jehovah, Jer. xxiii, 6; The Word, John i, 1; The Prince of Life, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, Rev. xix, 16. Can such titles be properly given to a mere man? If Jesus Christ were not possessed of supreme perfections, such names would rob God of his glory, and introduce that idolatry which he abhors. But if we allow, that the Father and he are personally distinct, yet essentially one, then these divine titles of right belong to Christ, and

could not be withheld without equally despising both the Father and the Son.

We shall just briefly refer to his works. It is said of Jesus Christ, "By him all things were created; that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers; all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist," Col. i, 16, 17. It is also expressly declared, "that all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or evil." And can such works be performed by any other than the supreme God? Can he who made all things, upholds all things, and will finally judge the whole world, be himself nothing more than a limited and created being? Who that diligently reads, and candidly examines the Scriptures, can admit such a conclusion?

When Christ was on earth, he was worshipped both by men and angels; and now that he sits with the Father on his throne, he is adored by all the bright hosts of heaven. Rev. v, 12, 13.

Nor do the objections to the Saviour's divinity carry any weight, when the Scripture arguments for it are closely considered. Those passages, which speak of Christ as inferior to the Father,

may be fairly interpreted as relating to his assumed nature, or mediatorial character. Without entering into this subject controversially, I shall briefly mention those perfections and excellencies of Christ which encourage our dependence on him.

1. Christ is possessed of universal knowledge and infinite wisdom. *Our* views are indeed, at best, contracted and confused; but all things past, present, and future, are manifest in his sight. "The heart," says the prophet, "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Can a creature penetrate its folds and mazes, or fathom its depths? No; but Jesus Christ needs not that any should testify, for he knows what is in man. Thus he speaks, Rev. ii, 23, "And all the churches shall know, that I am He which searcheth the reins and the hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to his works." It is but little at most, that we can understand of God; but Christ knows the very essence of the Father, in the same manner as the Father knows the Son. See, for proof of this assertion, those remarkable words, Matth. xi, 27.—Wisdom is that which judges of the fitness of things, or chooses the best means to attain the best ends. Shall we then compare the wisdom of Christ with the wisdom of

the most celebrated philosopher? It would be like holding up a glimmering taper as a rival to the noon-day sun. Jesus Christ is wisdom itself, not a slender portion derived from it. The greatest prophets and apostles had only a few broken scattered rays: He is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. An inspired writer tells us, "That in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii, 3. How full and expressive is this language. Wisdom and knowledge are called treasures on account of their unspeakable value: they are said to be hid, not that they are shut up from us, but rather that they surpass our comprehension; they are all hid in Christ, as the grand and never-failing depository. Besides, we are not only sure that Christ is the fountain of wisdom, but also that he is ready to communicate from his inexhaustible stores to us. Hence, Paul, writing to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. i, 31, says, "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." How well then is he qualified to teach us, and direct our doubtful steps in the way of life! Happy is the man, who, no longer leaning to his own understanding, entrusts his immortal soul to the unerring guidance of the "only wise God, our

Saviour!" Happy is the believer, who with deep humility and child-like simplicity sits at the feet of Jesus, to drink in divine knowledge and heavenly consolation! Thrice happy is the favoured Christian, who, sensible how much error and uncertainty there is in the world, turns his eyes wholly to the blessed Immanuel, and cries, "Lord, to whom can I go but unto thee, thou hast the words of eternal life!"

2. Christ is possessed of unlimited authority and almighty power.

While he was here on earth, diseases vanished at his touch, and devils trembled and fled at his word. The multitude were astonished at his doctrine, and the manifold miracles which accompanied it, Mark i, 27. Well might they in amazement cry, "What thing is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Besides, he endowed his disciples with the power of working many miracles. When, therefore the question is put by the prophet, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this, that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" It is Christ who answers, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." How distressing would this thought be to the mind of the Christian; Perhaps Jesus, though

willing, is not able to deliver my soul from the pit of destruction! Indeed there seems a manifest impropriety in calling him a *Saviour*, unless he possesses power to rescue perishing sinners from the most imminent danger and degrading bondage. In the Scriptures we see his omnipotence abundantly displayed. How many precious souls, by his outstretched arm, have been snatched back from the opening gulph of despair? And is his hand now shortened that it cannot save, or his ear heavy that it cannot hear? No, having all power in heaven and earth, he is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him." Jesus Christ, as the anointed King of Zion, governs his church with a sceptre of power and righteousness. On his almighty arm, how securely may the believer rely! The apostle Paul found the comfort of such a dependence amidst all the fires of persecution, saying, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," 2 Tim. 1, 22.

3. In Christ we behold matchless condecension and kindness.

Earthly princes are only feeble worms, their loftiest elevation is a mole-hill, and their brightest splendour a vain show. Yet how rarely do they descend from their thrones to visit and relieve

those who languish in the abodes of poverty and wretchedness! In our low and lost estate Jesus Christ not only saw and pitied us, but also hastened on the wings of love to bring salvation. "He was eternally rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." He was clothed with light, and surrounded with hosts of happy adoring spirits, yet he submitted to put on our nature, and sojourn among guilty, worthless mortals. Herein is love! love without a parallel, love that exceeds description and passes knowledge! The incarnation of the only begotten Son of God is a mystery of wisdom and love, in which all our thoughts ought to be absorbed, with which all our hearts should be enraptured. The wonders of the vast universe, could they be collected and presented to us in one view, would lose all their attraction, and dwindle into insignificance, were we stedfastly to contemplate the marvellous condescension of the Redeemer, manifested in the humiliation to which he submitted on our account. When he exchanged his throne for the manger of Bethlehem, the shining host of heaven burst into that sublime song, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men."

How can a Christian more effectually learn to abhor pride, and cultivate unaffected humility,

than by keeping his eye fixed on the adorable Redeemer. Thus Paul exhorts the Philippians, "Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," Phil. i, 6—8. Here is condescension, which we could not have believed possible, had it not been so clearly and amply revealed. The kindness and love of God our Saviour towards men appeared with pre-eminent lustre, in the whole of that great work, which he undertook to perform for their salvation.

4. Christ is distinguished for faithfulness and immutability.

We have in the Gospel exceeding great and precious promises, but what certainty is there that they shall be fulfilled? We must direct our eyes with cheerful confidence to Jesus, who is the faithful and true witness. All the great, and good, and glorious things which he has spoken concerning the prosperity of his church in general, and the happiness of every believer in particular, shall be assuredly accomplished. All the

promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us.

Ministers are called watchmen, stewards, ambassadors. However eminent their gifts, however extensive and useful their labours, they are not suffered long to continue. They fill their sphere, serve their day, and are called away to give place to others, who in their turn are mingled with the dead. "The fathers, where are they, and the prophets, do they live for ever?" Every thing on earth is frail and changeable, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Here is a refuge that never fails, a rock that never decays, a vine that never withers. Some men obtain extensive dominions, and high-sounding names, and in a few years they are forgotten. It is not so with Christ. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion throughout all generations. His wisdom, power, love, and faithfulness, are as suitable grounds for our dependence as they were for the first Christians. Hence that sublime language which is applied to him, Psal. lxxii, 17, 18, "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." We may justly infer,

1. If all perfections and excellencies dwell in

Christ, it is the duty, and ought to be the delight of believers to love, honour, and obey him.

Divine love is the purest and strongest principle that actuates the soul. It is the perpetual fire that burns on the altar of the renewed heart. And what object is so worthy of our warmest and best affection as that Saviour, in whom all perfections and glories essentially reside?

Do I, says the Christian, regard a friend who notices me in obscurity, pities and partakes my sorrows, and at all times directs me by his counsel, as well as cheers me with the light of his countenance? And shall I not more ardently love that great friend of sinners, who with the tenderest sympathy alleviates all my sufferings, and with the firmest constancy stands at my right hand, that I may not be greatly moved?—Yes, blessed Jesus, I love thee above all! Thou didst notice me when I deserved to be cast off for ever; thou dost stoop to hold communion with me in ordinances; "thou only art a friend at all times, that sticketh closer than a brother."

Do I regard with affection a surety who becomes answerable for my debt, when the stern demands of justice fill me with apprehension, alarm, and anguish? And shall I not love that heavenly Surety, who, when I owed more than ten thousand talents, and had nothing to pay, un-

dertook to satisfy the claims of inflexible justice on my behalf? Yes, blessed and adorable Redeemer! How can I do otherwise than love thee, who didst unsolicited tender down that full ransom, which procured my release?

Do I love the deliverer, who saved my life from the greatest danger, by hazarding his own?—And shall I not much more love that generous and mighty Saviour, who not only hazarded, but also actually gave up his own life to rescue me from the abyss of destruction? Do I love the benefactor, whose hand and heart are always open to relieve and assist, even when all others forsake me? And shall I not love him, out of whose fulness all my wants are liberally and constantly supplied? O thou most gracious and merciful Redeemer, I am constrained to love thee! Thou art worthy of my most ardent affection. Thou didst deliver my poor helpless soul from the bottomless pit of perdition; and every moment thou art loading me with benefits! Such are the sentiments, which rise from the melting and grateful heart of the renewed Christian.

It is the duty, and ought to be the delight of all believers to honour Christ. Come, O humble Christian, and bring to Jesus the tribute of praise. "He is thy Lord, and worship thou him." Give to him the homage due to his *Nature*. "Is he not

the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last? Is he not over all, God blessed for ever?" It is on this ground, that "all men are commanded to honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."

Draw nigh, O believer, and give to the Redeemer the glory due to his *Name;* a name which is far above every other, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue swear.

Come, grateful Christian, render to him the praise due to his *finished work*. He vanquished all thy foes, and entered the everlasting gates of glory in triumph. Yes, replies the believer, Thou, gracious Saviour, art worthy to be incessantly magnified and adored. Once thou wast crowned with thorns, and mocked with a reed and a purple robe; but now thou art crowned with glory, swaying a sceptre of righteousness, as the Head of all principalities and powers. Once thou wast by blasphemous tongues vilified and reproached, and by wicked hands crucified and slain; but now thou art seated with the Father on his throne, receiving homage from ten thousand angels, who cast their bright crowns at thy feet. And shall not I bring my poor offering of praise? Though I can add nothing to thine essential blessedness, yet would I join the heavenly hosts to celebrate thee. My mouth shall be filled with thy praise and thy honour all the day.

It is the duty, and ought to be the delight of believers, to obey Christ.

Possessed of universal authority, girded with irresistible strength, and exalted to transcendant majesty, he demands and deserves submission and allegiance from all. Wherever the Gospel has produced a thorough change of heart, it will be manifested by actual obedience to Christ.—The true believer does not consider him as a hard Master, nor his service as a wearisome drudgery. Bowing at his feet with unfeigned humility, he cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" I believe thou art wise to direct, gracious to assist, and able to defend me. I would call no man master on earth, for thou art my Lord and my God. Thou didst purchase me with thine own blood, and I would therefore glorify thee in my body and spirit, which are thine.

2. If all perfections and excellencies dwell in Christ, then to reject and despise him involves in it the deepest guilt and the most dreadful consequences. The degree of enormity or evil in any offence rises in proportion to the dignity or amiableness of the person offended. This is according to the eternal rule of rectitude. He who reviles and resists a great and good prince, whom he ought to revere and obey, commits a heavy crime. What then shall we say of those, who

despise the King of heaven and earth, the divine Redeemer, and reject with scorn his salvation? No words can fully express the height of their presumption, and the heinousness of their guilt. As angels rejoice in the return of one repenting sinner to God, may we not justly suppose that they mourn, to see worms of the earth daring to set themselves against the Lord and his anointed, whom they unceasingly adore? How awful and tremendous are the Divine threatenings against the enemies of the Saviour! "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha," 1 Cor. xvi, 22. Is it asked, why does a curse so heavy hang over his devoted head? Why does a doom so terrible await him? It may be sufficient to answer, because the want of love to Christ necessarily indicates enmity of mind, perverseness of will, and unbelief of heart. To reject Christ, and his word, is to choose darkness rather than light, to prefer error to truth, and to forsake infinite excellence for vanity and sin. If this, reader, be your case, let me entreat you to think seriously on your guilt and danger. While alienated from God, and without Christ, you are pouring contempt on the greatest gift of heaven! While in your present hardened state, "you are making God a liar, because you receive not the record he hath given of his Son!" Awful

condition! He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." He, whose power could have long ago sunk you to the lowest hell, still exercises his marvellous long-suffering and mercy towards you. Hear then the voice of warning and exhortation, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in thee."

CHAP. II.

SHEWS THAT TRUE FAITH IS NECESSARY TO MAKE US EXPERIMENTALLY ACQUAINTED WITH THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

"To you that believe," says Peter, "Christ is *precious*." This word, in the original, signifies honour, dignity, value; and is applied to an object which excites reverence and esteem, attracts affection, and produces joy. And is not the full import of this term embodied in Christ? As the mighty King of Zion, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, are not all men commanded to honour the Son even as they honour the Father?" Is he not justly called "the Consolation of Israel," and the "desire of all nations?" And does not He, as in all things "having the pre-eminence," rightfully claim the throne of every heart, and merit a degree of love which admits no rival?

Yet it is true, that Christ is actually precious to none but those who believe. The connection there is between faith and the sweet enjoyment of

an interest in Jesus, it will be necessary to state and illustrate.

1. Faith gives us those bright discoveries of the suitableness, excellency, and glory of Christ, which kindle the purest and warmest affection to him. Unbelief is a veil upon the heart, a blind which covers the eyes of the understanding. To this we must attribute the deplorable ignorance and fatal delusion of the ancient Jews. They had the light of God's word, and the benefit of his appointed ordinances, yet Christ was to them as a root out of dry ground, they could see no form or comeliness to make him desirable; and he was therefore treated by them with the most marked contempt, and base ingratitude. Thus, through that blindness which happened to Israel in part, and which is traced by Paul to unbelief, the things that belonged to their peace were hid from their eyes. And are there not too many among nominal Christians in a similar state of darkness and self-delusion?

It is by faith, that we "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and thus enjoy an interest in his rich and salutary benefits. The command of the Redeemer, joined with a most animating promise, runs in these words; "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." Isa.

xlv, 22. The language in this remarkable passage has, probably, an allusion to the miraculous way in which the wounded Israelites received healing in the wilderness. As a punishment for their unnatural rebellion against God, they were bitten by the fiery flying serpents. The deadly venom began to spread rapid destruction through the camp. No balsamic herb in nature, no far-famed remedy of human discovery or application, could effect a cure. God then commanded Moses to form a brazen serpent, and elevate it in a conspicuous situation, that all who were wounded might look to it and live. To this our Lord refers, John iii, 14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Hence we may conclude, that faith is the eye of the soul, which firmly fixes upon a crucified Saviour, by whom alone we are rescued from perishing in our sins. Believing is earnestly and constantly looking unto Jesus.

Paul tells us, that "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It brings near the invisible world, unveils to the mind its grand and interesting scene, and impresses on the heart its solemn and momentous reality. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit,

we attain, by the piercing glance of faith, those clear, realising views of the Saviour, which at once enlighten and transform the soul. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Is it asked, why there are so many who live under this glorious dispensation of grace, sunk to the lowest degree of gross ignorance, and stupid insensibility? The inspired apostle shall give the answer. "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." When this dark veil is removed, and the regenerate sinner sees Jesus in the glory of his person, as the *fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely;* in the importance of his work, as the author of eternal salvation; he resembles a man suddenly placed in a new world. His affections, which had been cleaving to poor perishable objects of time, now ascend with rapturous ardour to things above. Faith is, if I may so speak, the new sense which gives us these discoveries, and the lively transports which accompany them.

Thus, Peter, speaking to the saints concerning Christ, says, "Whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and *full of glory.*" To those who thus believe, Christ is precious.

2. It is by faith that we receive Christ, while we cordially embrace all the divine testimonies concerning him.

Thousands profess to receive the Scriptures as the word of God, who never spent an hour in examining their meaning, or seriously comparing one part with another, to discover their connection, harmony, and use. And yet these people would perhaps be grievously offended to be classed among unbelievers. The Jews of old were never more rigidly attached to the letter of their law, than when they were wholly estranged from the spirit of it. They prided themselves in being the disciples of Moses, yet our Lord told them plainly, they did not believe the writings of Moses. And why did they lie under so heavy a charge! Because, while they were busied and bewildered in a multitude of external ceremonies, they entirely overlooked the design of God in the Mosaic economy; which was to exhibit, by various shadows, the substance of far better things to come. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to

them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who *believe on his name*," John i, 11, 12. Indeed it is impossible to receive Christ in all the offices which he fills, and the relations which he sustains on the behalf of the church, without the faith of God's elect. To receive Christ as the *messenger of the covenant*, is to set our seal without reserve to his testimony, and to find our chief delight in him. To receive Christ as the Redeemer, who purchased us with his blood, and restored our lost inheritance, is to fix our sole dependence on the cross, and cheerfully to serve him with our bodies and spirits, which are his. To receive Christ as the Prince of peace, the King of Zion, is at once to lay down the arms of rebellion, to touch the sceptre of his grace, and to triumph in his salvation. Nor is there any thing in all this impracticable. "Say not in thy heart, who shall ascend into heaven (that is to bring Christ down from above), but what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, *thou shalt be saved*." Here we see, that receiving Christ is, in fact, the same thing as cordially embracing all the tetimonies of divine truth concerning him. To those, who thus believe, he is precious.

3. It is by faith that the regenerate soul feels an intimate union with Christ.

If we have any spiritual life, it is certainly received from our divine Redeemer. As the branches derive their fatness from the root, and members their nourishment from the head; so Christians are fed and supplied, made fruitful and vigorous, by the grace of the Lord Jesus. Faith may be justly called the bond of union between Christ and his church. As a beautiful and instructive representation of this idea, the apostle Peter uses the following figurative language:— "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious: ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spriritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Here is the basis of our hopes, the pledge of our security and defence, the cement of our union, and the sum of all our happiness and glory. Our hopes are not built upon the yielding sand; no, but on the rock of Israel, whose work is perfect. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." To

build up ourselves on our most holy faith is truly to rest all our expectations with a firm, unshaken reliance on the blessed and adorable Saviour.

Here is the pledge of our security and defence. The words above quoted are in part taken from Isa xxviii, 16. "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." This foundation cannot be sapped by the silent decay of time, for Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. The most violent storms and assaults of enemies can never shake this rock: nor is the Church built upon it in the smallest danger, seeing it is expressly declared, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He that believeth has no cause to dread sudden alarms, for *he shall not be confounded.*

Here is the cement of our union. Christ is a living stone, and his people are lively stones built upon him, and intimately connected with each other. All have their proper places appointed, so as to give beauty, symmetry, and consistency to the whole. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee;

that they also may be one in us." (John xvii. 20, 21.) There is among the faithful a great diversity with respect to talents, graces, and outward circumstances; but they are, without distinction, possessors of this ineffable privilege, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ *is all and in all.*"

Here is the sum of all our happiness and glory. God, of old, chose the temple at Jerusalem, saying, "This is my rest, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." Even that was but a type of the church. Concerning believers it is declared, Ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, "I will dwell in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Now it is faith which gives the soul both union and communion with Christ. To those, therefore, who truly believe, who rest upon, and cleave to him, he is precious.

After thus stating the subject, it would be easy in a copious manner to illustrate it. But all the temporal things, which are beneficial or desirable, can afford but a faint and imperfect representation of the unparalleled excellencies of Christ. Yet it may not be improper briefly to mention a few similitudes, which the Scriptures employ to assist our minds on this most interest

ing subject. A remedy which assuages the anguish of pain, or removes the burthen of disease after every thing else has been tried in vain, may justly be called a *precious remedy*. Yet what are the keenest sufferings of the body, compared with the agonies of a soul pressed down under a load of guilt, and tortured with the stings of remorse? "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Now, as Christ is the great Physician, his grace is the the balm which eases the throbbing breast, and heals the broken heart. Too many, alas! are indifferent to him, because they feel not their disorder. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." But all who have felt the arrows of conviction fastened in the conscience, and deep sorrow of evangelical repentance, will know how to prize the remedy which infinite wisdom and covenant love have provided. Those therefore, who truly believe, know by experience, the efficacy of divine grace, and the consolation that is in Christ.

Food is precious to those who are in want. Oh! how do those who have been long exposed to all the extremities of famine, long for some scanty supply of their necessities! We have heard of travellers in sandy deserts, or voyagers wrecked on dreary, inhospitable coasts, who

would gladly have given a casket of jewels for a cup of water, or a wedge of gold for a morsel of bread. But how much more precious are spiritual blessings to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness! Christ compares himself to the manna, John vi, 33, 34, 35. "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they to him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." But without faith it is impossible to feed upon the rich provisions of everlasting love, and find the satisfaction they afford. Those only, therefore, who truly believe, know by experience the consolation that is in Christ.

Rest is precious to the *weary*. The labourer, who faints under the burthen and heat of the day, longs for the cool of the evening shade. How refreshing is the sweet blessing of rest, after toils, watchings, and conflicts! Now, under this figure, Christ addresses miserable and helpless sinners. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will *give you rest*." Oh! how suitable, how sweet, how necessary, how glorious, is this rest to the soul! We that have believed do enter into this rest. But nothing can supply the want of

faith. Those only, therefore, who truly believe, can know by experience the consolation that is in Christ.

Light is precious to men, who have been many years immured in dungeon-glooms. "Truly," says Solomon, "the light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun." And can we forget, that saints are, by the power of the Spirit, brought *out of darkness into marvellous light?* If natural light be so sweet, how much more is the light of God's countenance! What pure, and powerful, and delightful joys, does the Christian feel, when "the sun of righteousness arises upon him with healing under his wings!" But nothing like experience, springing from the exercise of faith, can make us happily acquainted with the consolation that is in Christ.

Liberty is precious to those who have known the horrors of bitter bondage. But the liberty of the soul very far surpasses in value that of the body. And who but Christ can bestow this inestimable blessing? "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed." This is justly styled, *the glorious liberty of the children of God.* Yet only those who truly believe actually possess the freedom which the charter of heaven grants, and know by experience the consolation that is in Christ.

"*Life* is precious," is a phrase which has passed

into a proverb. Nor is this saying more common than true. A man in imminent danger, or condemned to die, holds nothing too valuable that will save his life. And is not deliverance from spiritual and eternal death a matter of infinite importance? The most cursory glance into the Scriptures is sufficient to satisfy us, that our spiritual life flows wholly from Jesus Christ. God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Yet faith is absolutely necessary, to give and maintain this heavenly life in the soul. Gal. ii, 20, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life, which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." Thus we see, that those only who believe know by experience the rich consolation that is in Christ.

And now, reader, what think you of Christ? No subject of inquiry can be more important. If you are a wandering *sceptic*, you are a stranger to the preciousness of Christ. The thin, airy regions of speculation afford no solid comfort to feed and invigorate the soul. A constant and eager quest after the glittering novelties of opinion discovers not the road that leads to the temple of truth, or the only sure refuge of lost and miserable sinners; but rather seduces into the enchanted paths, which bewilder the mind in

all the mazes of error. Do not, therefore, think it a proof of superior powers and attainments, or a freedom from the shackles of vulgar prejudice and bigotry, to be always wavering amidst uncertain notions, and, weather-cock like, perpetually veering from point to point, or, as the apostle expresses it, "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine." Beware of those, who, by good words, and fair speeches, lie in wait to deceive. Too many, flattered with the specious pretence of philosophy, candour, liberality, and free inquiry, have sucked in the deadly poison of infidelity. Both reason and Scripture indeed require us *to prove all things*, but then, let us not forget to *hold fast that which is good*. "Take heed, lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your mind should be beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ."

If you are a *sordid worldling*, you are a stranger to the preciousness of Christ. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit." And when either the enjoyment, or the warm pursuit of earthly things, fills the head, the hands, and the heart, there is no room for Christ, no concern about the interests of the immortal soul. "No man can serve two masters." Are you all solicitude about the things of time? Do you put every thought on the stretch of contri-

vance, and every spring of active exertion in t
tion, to gain the possessions and pleasures of
world? Do you rise up early, sit up late,
eat the bread of carefulness? Think, what
Mammon done for his worshippers? What will
do for you? Will the world charm away the
of a fever, the benumbing stroke of a palsy,
the secret seed of a consumption? Will it sh
you from calamities and disappointments? V
it cure the lassitude of life, extract the sting
death, and gild the regions beyond the gra
Ah, no! the world leaves its deluded votaries,
the awful hour of extremity and darkness.
you then feel the force of an undue attachmen
earthly things? Remember you must let go y
eager grasp of the world, before you can lay h
on eternal life.

If you, my reader, are a cold, *formal profe*
of religion, you are a stranger to the precious
of Christ.

The dissolute profligate, when, at intervals,
tumults of passion and pleasure subside, may
expected to feel the point of faithful, well-dir
ed reproof, and listen to the voice of serious wa
ing. But creeds blindly received, confessi
unfeelingly uttered, and outward ceremonies
gularly observed, without vital principles,
generally fortify the mind to presumption. T

l then that you do not rest content with the low, instead of the substance of religion. It answer no good purpose to be only almost a istian! Nothing but a living faith can make a partaker of the lasting consolation that is hrist. If you believe, you will also be emlened to speak, and confess that Jesus is a ious Saviour.

CHAP. III.

SHOWS ON WHAT ACCOUNT, MORE PARTICULARLY, CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO BELIEVERS.

When the deep wretchedness and degrading slavery of being in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity are duly considered, how forcibly do we feel the words of the Psalmist, "The redemption of the soul is precious!" Compared with this grand object, every thing else is lighter than the small dust of the balance. "What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in *exchange for his soul?*" The worth of the soul baffles the power of calculation; and a proper sense of its danger, through the entrance and influence of sin, is the first sign of an awakened conscience, and penitent heart. But to what quarter shall we look for redemption? To whom shall we go for deliverance? We are told, "that without shedding of blood there is no remission;" and it is certain, that without remission there

can neither be true peace nor solid hope. This leads us,

1. To consider the consoling doctrine of atonement, on account of which Christ is esteemed precious by every believer. Happy for us, this doctrine is abundantly taught both in the Old and New Testament.

Christ is represented as a *substitute*, as a *ransom*, as a *sacrifice*, as a *propitiation*. Isa. lxiii, 5, 6; Galat. iii, 13; 1 Tim. ii, 6. These, and many other scriptures of the same kind, show in the fullest manner the design of the Saviour's death, and the special efficacy of his blood to take away sin. The important doctrine of the atonement was diligently taught by the apostles in all the churches. Hence Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, "I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures," I Cor. xv, 3. In no other way than through the divinely appointed medium of the Saviour's propitiatory sacrifice can pardon and peace flow to us. It is expressly said concerning Christ, "That he made peace by the death of his cross." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

This view of the death of Christ stamps a

dignity on the sacrifices which were offered under the law, and gives an instructive significacy to what might otherwise appear a needless and unmeaning service. The great number of innocent victims, which were slaughtered at the temple, could not purge guilt from the conscience; but they typically pointed out the Lamb of God, which was in due time "to take away the sin of the world." The law was only a shadow of good things to come, but the *body is Christ*. It was probably not less by the use of sacrifice than the language of prophecy, that Abraham gained that glimpse of the day of Christ, which gladdened his heart.

It is the atonement made by the blood of Jesus, which renders the cross an object so interesting to the Christian. This has, indeed, always been a stumbling-block to the unbelieving Jew, and a topic of scorn to the vainly wise, and the self-conceited Greek. But the enlightened saint, equally free from the dark errors of infidelity and the dazzling fires of enthusiasm, can look towards Calvary and exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And why this exultation? Was there any intrinsic virtue in the wood to which the dying Saviour was ignominiously fixed? No; it is the wondrous work

which he finished on the tree, that appears so marvellous in our eyes.

The propitiatory death of Christ, viewed by faith, fills and absorbs the mind, touches and melts the heart, raises and refines the affections, and completely transforms the whole character. So fully was the mind of the apostle occupied by this subject, that his language to the Corinthians is, "I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." "Herein is love," says John, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again." 2 Cor. v, 14, 15.

Is it surprising then, that Christ should be precious to believers? Can we see his matchless condescension, in stooping from a throne of glory to a cross of suffering and shame; can we understand the great end of his amazing humiliation and vicarious death; can we feel the sprinkling of his peace-speaking blood upon the conscience; and not love, adore, and magnify him? "O ye cold hearted, frozen formalists, on such a theme it is impious to be calm. Passion is reason, trans-

port temper here." What can elevate and rejoice the soul, if it be unaffected with the highest manifestations of eternal love? In the death of Christ, the power, wisdom, justice, and mercy of God shine forth in full, unclouded splendour. What language can with due force express the tender and lively emotions which spring up in the Christian's breast, as he silently muses on the delightful subject of redeeming love? O God! what is man, that thou art mindful of him! Thou didst not even spare thine own Son, but freely deliveredst him up for us all. Who am I, that such a price should be paid for my ransom! "It was not with silver and gold, and corruptible things, that my soul was redeemed; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and spot." Why, blessed and adorable Saviour, didst thou look in compassion on me, a worthless worm, a vile apostate, a hell-deserving rebel! O how is my soul lost in admiration and delight, when I contemplate this mystery! May thy love ever glow in my heart, and thy praise on my tongue! May I wholly live to thee, who hast died for me!

2. Christ is precious to believers, on account of the sufficiency of his righteousness for their salvation.

When the question is asked, "How shall a man be justified before God?" We may answer,

It must either be by personal obedience, or by an interest in the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. If a man be justified by his personal obedience, that obedience must be a strict and perfect conformity to all the commands of God through the whole course of life. The divine law is the only unerring, inflexible standard of moral rectitude. It extends not merely to actions and words, but takes cognizance of the thoughts and purposes of the heart. Covetousness is idolatry; a wanton look is adultery; and unreasonable anger is murder, in the eye of the law. It makes no allowances or abatement in compliance with the wish of the sinner. "But he that offendeth in the one point is guilty of all. Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Who, on this ground, can wait with confidence for the decision of the great Judge? Who can say, I have fulfilled the commands of God in their whole extent, without a single failure? Paul, by the most conclusive reasoning, demonstrates the vanity of such self-righteous pleas. "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, is evident, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." And surely it is a contradiction to say, that the same thing, which convicts us as transgressors, can justify us.

Besides, justification by personal obedience would make void the whole plan of the Gospel, for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. "To him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Rom. iv, 5. But to make it matter of claim, as a debt rather than a free gift, is to open a door for boasting, which is said to be wholly excluded.

We are told, that "by Christ, all who believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. The prophet Jeremiah, speaking of the Saviour, to show at once his proper divinity, and the relation in which he stands to us, says, "This is the name by which he shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness." Can we conceive of a title, or designation, more full of pleasing encouragement? "Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength. Isa. xiv, 24, 25.

The Scripture method of justification is often called the righteousness of God, to denote its origin, excellency, and sufficiency. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference." That our acceptance with God is in virtue of an interest in

the adorable Redeemer's merits, is indisputably evident, for, "As, by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so, by the obedience of one, many are made righteous." Thus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth: and on this account is esteemed peculiarly precious.

When the prodigal had tasted the bitterness of his folly, what lively transports filled his bosom, at the time he was received back to his father's arms, stripped of his vile raiment, clothed with the best robes, and freely welcomed to a happy feast. This instructive parable may serve to illustrate the state of the penitent returning sinner. When he comes to himself, he is smitten with remorse, and covered with shame. The filthy rags of his own righteousness are at once cast off, and he is invested in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. O how does the believer triumph in the unspeakable honour thus put upon him! He can adopt as his own the language of the prophet, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me in garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

The condemned criminal has abundant cause to exult, when his generous sovereign at once grants him a full pardon, and restores him to that favour which his crimes had justly forfeited.

But how much greater reason hath the believer to rejoice, that the sentence of a broken law is cancelled, and the whole weight of that punishment removed, which would have sunk him into endless despair. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." This privilege may animate us to set all enemies in earth and hell at defiance; and exclaim, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." Now, my reader, do you renounce every ground of self righteous trust, to stand accepted in the beloved? Do you earnestly wish and pray to be found at last in him, "not having your own righteousness but that which is by the faith of Jesus Christ?" How can you sufficiently value and honour Him whose blood cleanses, and whose righteousness clothes your guilty, perishing soul? To you he is and ever must be precious.

3. Christ is peculiarly precious to believers on account of the prevalence of his intercession.

In virtue of the exalted Mediator's intercession we enjoy free access to the throne of grace, and the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit. Aaron the Jewish high priest, entered once a year, on the great day of atonement, into the Holy of Holies, with the blood of sprinkling. He bore the names of the twelve tribes engraven upon his

breastplate, and presented prayer and supplication for them to God. Such an institution afforded no small encouragement to the faithful Israelites. But the temple, the sanctuary, the sprinkled blood, and consecrated priest, were but figures of the more honourable and happy privileges enjoyed under the Gospel. Christ is truly entitled "The great high priest of our profession, made after the order of Melchisedec." When he had offered a sacrifice, which for ever perfects all them that are sanctified, he entered not into the holy place made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. Are we deeply sensible of the many dreadful effects of sin? Do we feel and deplore our awful distance from God? Let us remember that there is a throne of grace, that no impassable bar prevents access to it; and that we have an able advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. What can afford more animating motives to draw nigh to God? How could the mercy-seat be made to present a more mild and attractive aspect to the humble, trembling supplicant? What urgent calls! what kind invitations! what warm remonstrances! what pleasing promises! to quicken our tardy, reluctant approach to Him, who heareth prayer. "Seeing, then, we have a great high priest, that is passed into the

heavens, Jesus the son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest, which cannot be touched by the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need." Here is ample encouragement to you, O doubting and disconsolate Christian. Do your fears unhinge and confuse your mind, in your attempts at devotion? Does the enemy spread his net to entangle and keep you back from the throne of grace, by telling you it is presumption to aspire so high as to address the Majesty of Heaven? Would he lull you to negligence, by suggesting, that you must make yourselves holy and fit, before you venture to pray? Or, on the other hand, would he fill you with apprehensions, lest you draw down judgments rather than blessings? Hence you may be furnished to repel the tempter's assaults. In addition to the pleasing words just quoted, I would mention another passage from the same epistle, of similar import. "Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil (that is to say his flesh), and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near

with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

It is only through the mediation of our adorable Redeemer that we enjoy the gracious and abiding influence of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus had vanquished death and hell, "He ascended on high, led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Astonishing condescension! Had he only sent one of the lowest of his angels to pay us a short visit, as the bearer of some kind message, we ought to have deemed it a great favour. But wonder, O heavens! the King of Glory himself deigns not only to visit but to dwell with us, who are but sinful dust and ashes, by his Spirit's influence. Surely we may adopt the words that Solomon used at the dedication of the temple. "Will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him!" O what language can express a thousandth part of our gratitude for a privilege, which would have been thought scarcely possible, or even entirely beyond the hope of fallen, degenerate men, had it not been divinely revealed, and happily enjoyed. Nor must we forget through what medium we are put in possession of this inestimable blessing.

When Jesus was personally with his disciples I said unto them, "It is expedient for you that go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come. But if I go away I will send him unto you." Do you, my reader, esteem it an inconceivable privilege to hold communion with God? This you enjoy through that Divine advocate: *who ever liveth to make intercession for us.* Do you seek and obtain the enlightening, sanctifying, and consoling influence of the Holy Spirit? This blessing is shed upon you through Jesus Christ our Lord. The experience of these favours endears the gracious Redeemer.

4. Christ is precious to believers, on account of his free, sovereign, all-sufficient grace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is free, undeserved favour. Were salvation to depend on any native, inherent goodness, or any meritorious performances of the creature, we might despair of ever attaining it, "for in us there dwelleth no *good thing*." "But it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the *seed*." In nothing do the ignorance, pride, obstinacy, and ingratitude of men more plainly appear than in their backwardness frankly to acknowledge, that every spiritual blessing flows solely from the covenant mercy of God, through Jesus Christ. All the schemes of false doctrine

which assume so many shapes, and invent for their support so many plausible pleas, arise from disallowing the Saviour, and setting up self in his stead. The language of the Holy Spirit therefore on this subject is remarkably explicit, as intended to destroy, root and branch, that overweening opinion of their own goodness, which so directly tends to puff up men of corrupt minds. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the *gift of God.*" Eph. ii, 8. The reason assigned why it is not of ourselves, nor of works, is, that pride may have no room to spread its ostentatious plumes. "Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the *law of faith.*" This doctrine not only cuts off the buds of vain glory, which shoot forth with a luxuriant growth; but also deadens, to its very root, the parent stock, the principle of self-righteousness, from which they spring. The true Christian, humbled to the dust under a sense of his utter unworthiness, and filled with gratitude at the view of his vast obligations, can exclaim, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

A very little attention to the sacred Scriptures may suffice to convince us, that as God is the giver of every blessing, so he has a sovereign right to bestow or withhold his favours, according to the

good pleasure of his will. None without presumption can question his wisdom or authority, and say, *What doest thou?* None can arraign his justice, without *charging God foolishly.* Art thou then a subject under the government of reigning grace? Who maketh thee to differ? or what hast thou that thou hast not received? Surely all, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, have great reason to adore the hand that singled them out from the thoughtless multitude, and snatched them as brands from the burning. Works, as a cause of salvation, as a ground of acceptance, are irreconcilably opposed to the whole scheme of sovereign, discriminating mercy.

"If it be by grace, it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace." Rom. xi, 6.

The saint is compassed with infirmities, he has many wants to be supplied, many corruptions within to be subdued, and many foes and temptations without to be resisted. Where then are his resources? Whence does he derive his supplies? How is he strengthened to do and suffer according to the will of God? I answer, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is exceeding abundant, with faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. Here is a fountain which can never be exhausted by the application of saints, through every age. Hither the feeble and the strong, the babe, the young man, and the father,

repair for fresh succours and constant help. From his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. Are you, my reader, deeply conscious of your own insufficiency, and willing to rely wholly on an Almighty arm? It is true, you have to wage warfare against hosts of subtle and powerful enemies, but be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. You have sometimes to meet temptations, and bear afflictions, which are painful as thorns in the flesh; but the Saviour stands by and whispers, "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is perfect in weakness." Are not these reasons sufficient to render Christ precious to those who truly believe?

It may not be improper here to subjoin a few words of caution.

1. Let not any think, that these privileges encourage, or even permit licentiousness. Some, under a pretext of zeal for virtue and holiness, raise an objection to the doctrines above stated. If, say they, men be pardoned, justified, and saved, through the atoning blood, imputed righteousness, and unmerited favour of Christ, without any dependence on their own works; it is a matter of no consequence how they live, there remains no check to evil, nor motive to what is good. This, if it were well founded, would be a formidable objection. But let us examine it. We

read in the Scriptures, indeed, of *ungodly men turning the grace of God into lasciviousness*, but they are, on that very account, censured in the strongest language. There is no doctrine which has not been misrepresented, nor any blessing which may not be perverted. It is expressly said, we are justified freely by his grace. What then, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. Every one, who receives the truth in the love of it, must revolt with abhorrence from the very thought of a conduct marked with the most shameful ingratidude. To make the privilege of abounding mercy a licence to sin, is to

"Rebel, because 'tis easy to obey,
And slight for its own sake the gracious way."

If you, reader, feel inclined to take the doctrines of the Gospel as a pillow for indolence, or a cover for sensual indulgence; it is a sad sign that you are living without hope and without God in the world. In vain is your head stored with sound doctrines, if your heart be unsanctified. The best motives to obedience spring from evangelical principles. "The grace of God, wherever it is truly received, teacheth to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present evil world."

2. *Let* not any think Christ precious to them because they have accustomed themselves to speak in tender, endearing terms concerning him. Can any thing be more disgusting than the manner in which some people are ever talking of the sweet, lovely, and precious Jesus; while at the same time, they are grossly ignorant of his doctrines, and habitually inattentive to his commands? The judicious and sincere Christian ardently loves, indeed, but he also venerates his Lord; and cannot therefore address him, or commend him to others, with a profusion of the same fond, familiar language, as is commonly used in caressing children. It is granted, that some pious, but weak Christians, have in this way unintentionally degraded religion. But what apology can be made for those, who speak in the most affectionate style concerning Christ, while total strangers to religious experience? What words can too pointedly reprobate the conduct of those, who catch, among professors of the Gospel, a few favourite phrases, which they employ as a disguise more successfully to gain their selfish purposes? The character of Judas, that arch dissembler, who cried "Hail, master!" and kissed him, at the very moment of betraying him, is in such persons copied stroke for stroke. Awful beyond description is their state, whose religion

dwells on the tongue in good words, without ever influencing the heart or the conduct. No specious professions can deceive the Searcher of hearts; and Christ will say to such, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" But happy are they, who not only speak of the glorious honour of his Majesty, and the wonders of his love; but also feel an entire, undistracted dependence upon him, and a sincere, unabated affection to him. They can unite with the Poet:

"Thou art the source and centre of all minds,
Their only point of rest, eternal Word!
From thee departing, they are lost, and rove
At random, without honour, hope, and peace.
From thee is all that sooths the life of man;
His high endeavour, and his glad success;
His strength to suffer, and his will to serve.
But, O thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art, of all thy gifts, thyself the crown!"

COWPER.

CHAP. IV.

SOME SEASONS MENTIONED, IN WHICH CHRIST IS FOUND PECULIARLY PRECIOUS TO THE BELIEVER.

THERE are some seasons, which may be emphatically called, "Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." The Redeemer, who is the hope of Israel, and the source of spiritual joy, is always the same; but our frames and feelings are very changeable. Sometimes we have the peace which passeth understanding; at other times we are torn with inward disquietude. Now, the sun of prosperity and consolation shines with serene lustre; soon, perhaps, the gloomy storm approaches, and beclouds our hopes and joys. To-day, we are on the mount of transport; to-morrow, in the vale of sorrow. At one time, we walk at liberty; at another, deplore the entangling embarrassments and vexations of care. The life of a saint is a checkered and varying scene. There are, however, some seasons, in which the

believer enjoys the preciousness of Christ in a more than common degree.

1. Christ is often peculiarly precious, when an awakened, convinced sinner is first brought to partake the rich spiritual blessings of the everlasting covenant. When a man under the Holy Spirit's teaching comes truly to know, trust, and love the Redeemer, or, in the strong language of the apostle, "is translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," he enters upon a state of happiness, of which a stranger to religion can have no idea.

View the believer when he first begins to know Christ. To the inquisitive and enlarged mind, human science has many powerful attractions, and pleasing charms. How vivid is the joy which the student of nature feels, when his long labours and researches are rewarded with some great and valuable discovery? When Archimedes, the famous mathematician, had fortunately hit upon the method of solving a difficult problem, which opened his path into a new region of science, he could not contain his rapture, but rushing into the street exclaimed, "I have found it! I have found it!" There is, however, a kind of knowledge, as far superior to the highest attainments of philosophy, as the solemn realities of eternity surpass the transient bubbles of time.

"This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John xvii, 3. After a man has been a long time wandering on the dark mountains of ignorance, and bewildered in the endless labyrinths of error, who can speak the joy that he feels when the eyes of his understanding are enlightened to see the excellence of Christ, to know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints. Light is always sweet, but how welcome are its cheering rays to the lost, heart-fainting traveller, who has been exposed to all the perils and horrors of the night! He hails the opening morn, and feels joy revive and animate his sinking spirit. Such are the pleasures and transports of the Christian, when he first beholds the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He now no longer roves at random, amidst loose conjectures and perplexing uncertainties, but discerns and seeks the things which are excellent. "He knows that the Son of God is come, and hath given him an understanding to know him that is true." Thus is verified the language of Solomon, "When wisdom entereth into thy heart, knowledge shall be pleasant to thy soul." It is said, that Justin Martyr, while a heathen philosopher, eagerly tried system after system, and hastened from sect to sect, in

search of truth, but was still more and more embarrassed and miserable. At length, by the leading events of Providence, he was brought to an acquaintance with the glorious Gospel, and soon found, in the school of Christ, that certainty and that full satisfaction, which were elsewhere sought in vain. How much more sublime and desirable was the joy of Justin, in finding the knowledge of Christ, than the rapture of Archimedes, in solving his mathematical problem!

Besides, when an awakened soul begins truly to know, it will learn firmly to trust Christ. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." I grant it is not unusual for the sinner, under the alarms or pangs of conscious guilt, to try many vain expedients to procure a little temporary ease. Sometimes he endeavours to drown the recollection of the past, and the thought of the future, by plunging into that torrent of dissipation and folly, which hurries thousands into the gulph of utter ruin and despair. Wretched expedient! Gay companions, flattering amusements, and midnight revels, instead of assuaging, eventually increase the anguish of a troubled conscience. From this quarter he turns perhaps to the law of God, and resolves by fulfilling its commands to erect a fortress of security on the ground of his own righteousness. He hopes that

a punctual attendance on religious ordinances, deeds of charity to men, and acts of zeal for God, may atone for his follies, and furnish a passport for heaven. But as increasing discoveries are daily gained of the evil of sin, and the depravity of the heart; these, and all the other strong holds of legal hope, are forsaken, while the trembling transgressor anxiously cries, "What shall I do to be saved?" In this state of deep concern, the sinner hears the testimonies and calls of the unerring word. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The sinner lays hold on these delightful invitations and promises, crying, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." Here is found the only antidote to the poison of sin. Here the troubled heart gains quietness and assurance for ever. Here, after the failure of many false props, and the violence of many dashing billows, the soul finds a firm basis of confidence, and a sure anchor of hope. "By two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope

set before us." Heb. vi, 18, 19. None but those who have found what an evil and bitter thing sin is, and who have felt those arrows of the Almighty, the convictions of a wounded conscience, can tell the preciousness of Christ. O! says the believer, unto me, the chief of sinners, hath heavenly mercy extended the inestimable benefit of pardon, and the glorious hope of eternal life! "I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me. He hath in love to my soul delivered it from going down into the pit." Blessed Saviour! can I forget the hand which snatched me from everlasting burnings? Can I ever be insensible of thy tender compassion, and marvellous loving-kindness? O, how can I sufficiently feel my obligations, or magnify as I ought the grace, which bringeth salvation to such a rebel as I am?

Nor will there be an experimental knowledge of Christ, and a firm trust in him, without a pure and fervent love towards him.

Faith and love, as kindred graces, are united in their power on the heart. When the dignity, condescension, wisdom, power, and faithfulness of Christ are clearly discerned, the poor, perishable objects, which before possessed the chief share of the affections, lose their lustre, and cease to charm. "If any man love father or mother, wife or sister, house or lands, more than

me, he is not worthy of me," once perhaps appeared a hard saying, but it becomes easy to be understood, "when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." The young Christian often feels, in a high degree, the melting power and glowing ardour of holy love to Jesus. The sacred fire intensely burns on the altar of his heart, and sends forth the grateful odour of acceptable praise. All the desires and affections of his soul are drawn out and placed on things above, where "Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Ask him at this time, while he is peculiarly alive to every warm and tender emotion, What think you of Christ? and he will reply,

"His worth, if all the nations knew,
Sure the whole earth would love him too."

How often, after the lapse of many years, does he mourn the languor of his affections, and feel applicable to his own case the reproof given to the church of Ephesus; "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do thy first works," &c. How often does he wish he could recal those tender, ingenuous meltings of heart, and those lively, enrapturing transports he experienced in the day of his espousals,

when he put off the garments of mourning, to be girded with gladness. "Oh!" says he, "that it were with me as in months that are past! Then I could sometimes mount as on eagles' wings, and leaving the world behind, enjoy a calmer and purer region." How did the bright manifestations of my Saviour's glory eclipse the faded splendour of every inferior object! How did the tokens and fruits of his amazing love refresh my fainting spirit! While his free abounding grace filled every faculty, warmed every passion, and captivated every thought, my soul could adopt the glowing language of the poet:

——————— "Thou, my all!
My theme! my inspiration! and my crown!
My soul's ambition! pleasure! wealth! my world!
My light in darkness! and my life in death!
My boast thro' time! bliss thro' eternity!
Eternity too short to speak thy praise,
Or fathom thy profound of love to man!
To man of men the meanest, even to me!
My sacrifice! my God!" YOUNG.

Do you remember such a time of holy peace and heavenly joy? Then let the remembrance of the past quicken your diligence in the use of such means as are best adapted to revive your spirit. But perhaps, my reader, you never yet at any

time, experienced Christ to be precious to you. Alas! how much real happiness have you lost, by alienation of mind from him! And can you still be content to feed upon the husks of the world! Will you continue to waste life in chase of shadows and phantoms. "Life is short! It is," says a living writer, "a serious reflection that life is short! The weakness and folly of childhood, the vanity and vices of youth, the bustle and care of middle life, and the infirmities of old age, what do they leave us? A short life indeed!" Will you then reject that Saviour, who is chosen of God and precious, and spend the few moments of your time which remain, in pursuing those trifles and forbidden vanities, which terminate in sorrow and vexation of spirit? Incline your ear to the counsel of Heaven. Behold, seated on the throne of grace, the blessed Redeemer. "Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace, thereby shall good come unto thee." Entrust, fearlessly entrust your soul, and all its immortal interests, in his mighty and merciful hands. Centre your affections in him, as the King of glory, and you will know by experience that he is precious.

2. In a time of affliction, Christ is often peculiarly precious to the believer.

It would be inconsistent with my present design to enter largely on this subject. It may be

seen, as well as many other subjects which relate to the exercises of the divine life in the soul, very fully treated in Buck's excellent work on Religious Experience. Christians, it is sufficiently obvious, have no patent to exempt them from the diseases, losses, and disappointments common to human life. When the believer enters his Divine Master's service, he is not flattered with the promise of uninterrupted worldly ease, affluence, and honour, but forewarned to prepare for conflicts and sufferings. "And I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." Yet even that affliction which infinite Wisdom has seen fit to mingle in our cup serves to wean us from the world, and to enhance in our estimation the value of our spiritual privileges. A heathen used to declare, that there are some useful lessons, which can be nowhere effectually learnt but in the school of adversity. The apostle, however, not only shows the great and good end to be answered by affliction, but also the process, if I may so speak, by which that end is attained. "We glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, be-

cause the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us." At first view it may appear strange and unaccountable, that the believer should take pleasure in infirmities, necessities, and distresses for Christ's sake. But the reason must be considered. It is not that the feelings of the man are destroyed by the experience of the Christian. It is because, in these trials, sin is rendered more hateful, holiness more lovely, and Christ more precious.

When pain, poverty, crosses, disappointments, insults, and persecutions, lead the soul to the throne of grace, and endear the sweet promises of the Gospel, they become truly salutary and advantageous. Thus all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. Is the saint worn with disease, or driven into the straits of necessity, he contemplates with a more lively interest the humiliations and sufferings of his Lord. "Shall I," says he, "complain of poverty, while I see Jesus, who was eternally rich, for my sake voluntarily becoming poor? Though he had not where to lay his head, yet no murmur escaped from his lips." Can I, who deserve the heaviest miseries, complain of these light afflictions, while I see Jesus a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? What temptations in the wilderness, what mock-

eries and buffetings in the hall of judgment, what exquisite pangs and agonies in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross of Calvary, he endured for me! Lord, however afflicted in body, let my soul be in health and prosper; whatever poverty I may feel in temporal things, may I be rich in faith, and an heir of the heavenly kingdom, and I ask no more.

Is the Christian exercised with family troubles and bereavements? How often do those rending strokes, which rob him of created comforts, make him cleave with firmer purpose of heart to the Lord. He may shed a tear of love over a departed relative or friend, but he sorrows not as those who have no hope. He can say, "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." My children die, but Jesus ever liveth. The most tender ties of nature shall be dissolved, but nothing can break the bonds of that love which unites my soul to the blessed Redeemer. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

Has the Christian to undergo many trials in the world, from the clamours of prejudice, the taunts of scorn, or the secret plots and open assaults of malice? He is not surprised nor dis-

couraged. Such treatment from this quarter verifies in his experience the words of his Divine Master. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace." The three courageous Israelites, who nobly refused to worship the king of Babylon's idol, were never more highly favoured than when they had "one like unto the Son of God" with them in the furnace. And thus Christians often find in the fiery trial the sensible and cheering presence of their Lord. When we are most exposed to the frowns of men, the smiles of our heavenly Father's countenance are most enjoyed. Infinite wisdom has so kindly ordered it, that there should generally be a measure of inward peace and joy, to balance the weight of outward trouble and affliction, that we may experience on account of religion. Many have been able to say, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ." When Paul and Silas were shut up in the dreary dungeon at Philippi, they were favoured with so much rapturous joy, that they burst forth into songs of praise to God at midnight, and the prisoners heard them. Doubtless, it was one of the happiest nights of their life. They found, that no bolts and prison-guards could deprive them of the Divine presence; no chain that galls the body could shackle the soul.

Should it be said, such instances as these are extraordinary. Be it so. Yet there are cases daily occurring, in which we may see the obvious benefit of sanctified affliction. Mr. Baxter wrote that useful book, the Saint's Rest, when he was far from home, without any other book to consult but his Bible, and in such a bad state of health, as to be in continual expectation of death for many months; and therefore he fixed his thoughts on heavenly rest, which he declared had benefited him more than all the other studies of his life.

Have you, reader, found even in affliction the sweetness and sufficiency of the Saviour's grace? Then bless God for his chastening hand in all your trials. Seek especially the light of the Redeemer's countenance, and let past experience encourage you in all future troubles.

3. In the hour of death, Christ is often peculiarly precious to the believer

There is something unspeakably awful in the last hours of irreligious characters. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." How dark are the prospects, how uncomfortable the feelings of the expiring infidel! How dreadful is the summons of death to the sordid worldling! Torn from his hold of all earthly things, he is forced, unprepared, to appear at the bar of an

offended God. How bitter are the last moments, how painful the last struggles of the dying profligate! A dreadful sound in his ears, a gloomy cloud before his eyes, and a heavy burthen lies on his conscience! The feeble glimmer of false hope is extinguished, and leaves him in the darkness of despair. Now contemplate the last moments of the Christian. "The river flows with the smoothest stream when it descends toward the ocean, and the sun sheds the most mild, reviving lustre in its setting." Such is the happy close of the Christian's course.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." But whence spring the peace, the comfort, the joy, and triumph of the Christian in his dying hours? By what wonder-working power is he sustained, when feeble nature sinks under the stroke? What secret, mysterious charm transforms the king of terrors into a messenger of joy? It is faith in the Son of God. Now Christ is indeed precious. Now the believer finds it sweet to think of what Christ has done for him, and what he will be to him for ever.

He thinks of what Christ hath done for him. "I am going," says he, "the way of all flesh." "Worms must destroy this body, but I know that my Redeemer liveth." "He took not on him the

nature of angels; but, O! astonishing condescension, he took on him the seed of Abraham." "He gave himself for me, to redeem me from all iniquity. For me he conquered the powers of death and hell. For me he hath prepared a mansion of bliss, and a crown of glory, which fadeth not away. Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!"

At this period he thinks with delight of what Christ hath wrought in him.

The image of God was blotted and defaced by the entrance of sin, and it must be restored before the soul can be fit for heaven. Hence it is said, "without holiness no man can see the Lord." A kingdom of unspeakable happiness is promised, but we must "be made meet to be partakers of that bright inheritance." "When the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" but we also must be previously fitted for it. "Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given us the earnest of the Spirit." O! says the dying saint, what a mercy that I should be arrested in my mad career by the arm of an Almighty Redeemer, and brought to a knowledge of his salvation! What a privilege is the gift of

the Holy Spirit, by which my polluted heart is renewed! To my unworthy soul he hath granted the heavenly manna, the bread of life, in this wilderness. To me he hath given a *new name*, as a preparative for the New Jerusalem. How then can I fear in the moment of dissolution? No: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better than the highest and happiest place on earth.

In the hour of death the Christian can think with delight on what Christ will be to him for ever.

The men of the world have their portion in this life, and a poor, despicable portion it is. Very different is the lot of the saint. He can look higher than all created good, and say, "My heart and flesh fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. My life is hid with Christ in God; and when he who is my life shall appear, then shall I appear with him in glory." Adieu, ye toys and trifles of time! How dim and vanishing the scenes! How tasteless and unsatisfying the delights of this lower world! "I long to be absent from the body, and for ever present with the Lord!" Such is the calm, the pleasing, and triumphant end of the Christian.

It would be easy to introduce many examples, but I shall here mention only a few. William, Lord Russel, who was cruelly beheaded under false pretences, declared, just before his execution, "Neither my imprisonment, nor the fear of death, have been able to discompose me in any degree. On the contrary, I have found the assurance of the love and mercy of God in and through the blessed Redeemer, in whom alone I trust. And I do not question but I am going to partake of that fulness of joy which is in his presence; the hopes of which do most wonderfully delight me, that I think this is the happiest time of my life, though others may look upon it as the saddest."

Dr. John Owen, in a letter which he wrote to a particular friend but two days before his death, expresses himself in these words: "I am going to him whom my soul has loved, or rather, who has loved me with an everlasting love, which is the whole ground of all my consolation. The passage is very irksome and wearisome, through strong pains of various sorts, which have all issued in an intermitting fever. I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm; but whilst the great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live and pray, and hope, and

wait patiently, and do not despond; the promise stands invincible, that he will never leave us nor forsake us."

The late pious Romaine was a zealous and successful preacher of the Gospel of Jesus, and adorned it by a suitable conduct above fifty years. In his last illness not one fretful or murmuring word ever escaped his lips. "I have," says he, "the peace of God in my conscience, and the love of God in my heart. I knew, before, the doctrines I preached to be truths, but now I experience them to be blessings. Jesus is more precious than rubies; and all that can be desired on earth is not to be compared to him." He was in full possession of his mental powers to the last moment; and near his dissolution cried out, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty! Glory be to thee on high, for such peace on earth and good will to men!"

"I am full of confidence," said Dr. Doddridge, "there is *a hope set before me:* I have fled, I still fly for refuge to that hope. In him I trust. In him I have strong consolation, and shall assuredly be accepted in the beloved of my soul." Many instances of a similar kind will be recollected by those who have read authentic accounts of the lives and deaths of good men. And now, reader, do you heartily desire that Christ may

be thus precious to you in your last moments? Do you breathe out the wish of Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?" Then,

1. Hasten, by faith, to the fountain of the Redeemer's blood. Can all the world make death easy to that man who is overwhelmed with a mountain of guilt? Do you not shudder at the idea of being summoned away while unpardoned, unchanged, unsanctified? Do you not dread to think of meeting Jesus as a judge, before you have heartily acknowledged and received him as a Saviour? And how are these tremendous consequences to be avoided? There is but one way, and that is, faith in the atonement made by the Son of God. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Thousands of rams slaughtered in sacrifice, and ten thousand rivers of oil, could not purge away one transgression. But here is a propitiation sufficient to cancel the longest list of the blackest crimes and iniquities. God graciously condescends to remonstrate with us. "Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. i, 18). Remember, that right views of the Saviour's death are necessary to give bright hopes to your death.

Let not the enemy tempt you to delay. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." The fountain of pardoning blood is open, the invitations of the Gospel are sounding in your ears, and the sceptre of mercy is still extended to you: then linger not, but entrust your everlasting concerns in the hands of Jesus.

2. Would you experience the preciousness of Christ in your last moments? then seek the influence of the Holy Spirit to dwell in you. What could be more dreadful than to feel a dark uncertainty, and a distressful conflict about your state, when you are just entering into eternity? What, if in that awful hour you should break out, "I am going, but oh! whither am I going; am I an heir of heaven, or a child of hell? This body must soon sink into the grave, a prey to worms and corruption: but what will become of my soul? Perhaps I shall be saved; perhaps I shall be lost. O! that I had some heavenly record, in which I could read my acceptance with God, or some kind ministering angel to whisper peace." Remember, if you wish to be free from such perplexity, that it is the office of the Holy Spirit to *seal the saints unto the day of redemption*. Pray that he may work in you that faith which shall enable you to lay hold on the great and

precious promises. You will then need no other record in which to read your title clear to glory. These promises, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, will be your support through life, and your passport from it to a better. Pray that the Holy Spirit may witness with your spirit, that you are one of the children of God. This inward witness will impart more confidence and comfort, than if a thousand ministering angels should surround your dying bed, to soothe the agonies of sinking nature, and soften your passage through death to the fair realms of eternal bliss.

3. Would you experience the preciousness of Christ in your last moments? then be continually in a waiting posture for the coming of the Lord. At most, you have but a few years to stay on earth. A thousand solemn admonitions daily warn you of approaching dissolution. The particular time, indeed, is kept an undiscovered secret in the decrees of heaven. Our times are in the hand of God. Do not then trifle away your golden hours of opportunity, which will never return. "You are," as the pious Dr. Watts speaks, "a borderer on the river of death, which will soon convey you into the eternal world, and therefore should be ever waiting the call of your Lord, that you may be ready to launch away to the regions of immortality. And are you then a tho-

less creature, perpetually wandering far up into the fields of sense and time, gathering the gay and fading flowers which grow there; or making garlands for ambition to crown your brow, till you shall be called off on a sudden, and hurried away from this mortal coast?" Take heed that you are not lulled into a spirit of careless indifference, by the things of the world. "Watch and pray, for you know neither the day, nor the hour, when your Lord shall come."

CHAP. V.

THE USE OF THOSE MEANS RECOMMENDED, WHICH HAVE A TENDENCY TO ENDEAR CHRIST.

"THE sacred writers," says an admired author, "have made things clear, in proportion as they are momentous; and such is the perspicuity with which many of the principles of religion are laid down in Scripture, that we should deem it impossible for them to be misunderstood, did we not know how easy it is to perplex a rule by which we dislike to walk, and remember what a power there is in the passions to pervert the dictates of the understanding, and baffle the admonitions of conscience." What can be more plain in Scripture, than that God has connected every desirable end with suitable means? When temporal prosperity is the object of pursuit, this truth is instantly perceived, and universally acknowledged.

He would be thought deficient in common sense, who should expect his lands to produce valuable crops without culture, or his trade to go on successfully without order, attention, and diligence: yet it is to be lamented, that there are some who boldly attempt to sever the intimate connection that subsists between religious privileges and duties. Can there be a more glaring and palpable absurdity? Is it possible to conceive a more shameful perversion of the doctrines of free-grace, than, under the pretence of making God the sole author of spiritual blessings, to nullify his solemn commands, and set aside his appointed ordinances? Nor does what is here suggested affect those only who live in the total neglect of means, but all who give merely a cold, partial, inconstant attention to them. Let us never forget who hath said, "Them that honour me will I honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." That the spiritual blessings which are in Christ Jesus may be fully enjoyed, I would earnestly recommend the following means:—

1. The reading of the Scriptures, accompanied with serious meditation.

Faith in Christ is the vital spring of heavenly consolation. We cannot warrantably expect to be filled with joy and peace, but in believing.

In the darkest ages of popery there was much unmeaning jargon about implicit faith, a blind assent to things utterly unknown, and even unexamined. But true faith is built upon knowledge, and divine knowledge is drawn from the word of God. We are assured, that all that is written in the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, concerning Christ, shall be fulfilled. Would you then grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? search with unwearied diligence, and deep humility, the sacred Scriptures. Do not rest satisfied with devoting to this employ merely a few scattered, occasional moments of your time. Many and specious are the pleas, with which men endeavour to justify or excuse the slight and careless manner in which they read the Scriptures. Some are deeply entangled in the multiplied and incessant affairs of business. The account books, which ascertain their profit or loss in trade, are punctually adjusted; but no regular portion of time is allotted to examine the Scriptures, which are both the source that supplies, and the standard that measures our spiritual profit. Many professing Christians, under the show of sociability and friendship, are engaged in a continual interchange of visits, which steal away many precious hours, and thus rob them of the opportunities which they possess of

increasing their acquaintance with the word of God. Others, who have both leisure and inclination for reading, are so occupied by the endless variety of human publications, that, although they appear scarcely able to live without books, they very rarely look into the Bible. And can we wonder, while this blessed book is so much neglected, at the coldness, languor, and unprofitableness of Christians? That you, my dear reader, may avoid such evils, let the perusal of the Scriptures make a part of your stated daily employ. Fence off, as sacred for this duty, a portion of your time, upon which no other business shall be allowed to encroach. Nothing can so well deserve, or repay your diligence, as the serious perusal of the word of God. Show the same resolute perseverance in this duty, that many evince in things of far inferior consequence. No one expects to fathom the depths of science by occasionally dipping into it; or to reap all the advantages of any particular branch of learning by slightly glancing upon its first principles. And can you reasonably expect the highest wisdom, without making one earnest effort in God's appointed way? The sacred Scripture is a field, which contains treasures of infinitely greater value than *thousands of gold and silver;* but you must dig to attain these treasures. Yes, here is the

pearl of great price which enriches the soul; do not then suffer baubles and toys to divert you from seeking it.

Besides, that you may be profited, it is not only necessary to read the Scriptures with diligence, but to yield your understanding to the dictates of inspiration, with humility and reverence. For want of this spirit many have, with considerable labour, searched the Bible, and yet have overlooked its grand design, the recovery of lost men by the glorious work of redemption. They have showed a lively curiosity in examining its records of surprising facts and events, but never obtained *precious* faith in the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. They have learned many things concerning the Christian religion; but never *so learned Christ* as to surrender their souls and everlasting interests into his hands, from the full persuasion, that there is no *other name* given under heaven among men by which we must be saved, but the *name of Jesus*. The apostle Peter tells us, "There are given to us exceeding great and precious promises." They are justly called *great*, from the importance of the subject to which they relate, the great salvation; and *precious*, on account of their sweetness in the experience of those who believe. Now, for these invaluable promises you must constantly

search the Holy Scriptures. A serious Christian will often find something very suitable and refreshing to the soul, where a careless reader discovers nothing interesting; just as the botanist plucks in his walks many a rare plant, which others would pass unnoticed, or perhaps trample under their feet. Not that we are to labour in order to find spiritual meanings, in defiance of the plain import of language, and the direct scope of the sacred writers. The wild notions that some people have attempted to draw from Scripture, when a weak judgment is overpowered by a warm and ungoverned imagination, ought to warn us to take heed how we read, as well as how we hear. There are surely plenty of passages in the Old and New Testament, in which Christ and his salvation are clearly revealed, without puzzling ourselves to find, or rather fancying them, in those places which evidently contain no references to them. Such a method of interpreting the Scriptures, as that which is here considered, is calculated to bring contempt on the oracles of truth. It gives a boundless licence to invent schemes the most absurd, and yet covers them with appeals to Scripture. Still, the weak and uninformed are often exceedingly delighted with this way of misrepresenting, under the show of explaining the word of God. To avoid such

errors and dangers, it is needful to seek Divine guidance, that we may both understand and rightly apply what we read.

To the constant reading of the Scriptures must be added serious *meditation*. The counsel which Paul gave to Timothy, "Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all," is not unsuitable advice to us. In the mere reading of the Scriptures, their matter glides off the mind, without producing any lasting effect. But by meditation the doctrines drop as the rain, and distil as the dew on the tender herb. In this way the spirit of Divine instruction is imbibed and retained. Yet there is perhaps no other duty to which we naturally feel so much indisposed. The mind, when bent to Divine things, is apt to start back like a deceitful bow. No sooner do the thoughts begin to ascend heavenward, than some sudden interruption breaks their flight, or some gross earthly care damps their ardour. The pious Philip Henry used to say, he could more easily bring himself to travel far, and hear many sermons, than spend one half hour in close meditation. Yet the believer can sometimes shake off the fetters and clogs which embarrass him, and range with delight through the sacred wood, as a garden rich in a variety of the choicest fruits. By meditation

we compare spiritual things with spiritual, and find a growing interest in them. By meditation we gradually ascend the mount of God, and enjoy clearer and more extended prospects. There are some bright examples to recommend this duty. We read that Isaac, the heir of the promise, went out at evening-tide to meditate in the fields. The devout Psalmist also could declare, "When I meditate on thee in the night-watches, in the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." And say, O Christian, does not a single promise of your Lord, like a ray of celestial light let into the mind, often kindle a train of reflections, which warm, expand, and elevate every faculty and every feeling? Does not a steady view of the Redeemer's personal glory appear to shed a lustre on his mediatorial work, and the perfection of his finished work give joy its purest sweets, and hope her fairest prospects? Does not the sublime theme of everlasting love, in those happy moments, seem to open in fresh discoveries, and new wonders sufficient to enwrap the soul in extasy and amaze? "Ah!" you reply, "I remember such a solitary evening's walk; and, while I was musing on the excellencies of that Saviour, who is made to me wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, even the face of nature put on new

beauties, and smiled with added charms. I remember the silent watches of such a night, when from the world's busy and tumultuous scenes my thoughts were wholly employed in contemplating and admiring the various manifestations of the love of God in Christ Jesus! I remember many a happy morning, when, after the balmy blessings of repose, reading, sedate reflection, and ardent prayer have rendered my closet a Bethel, a house of God. Yes, at those seasons my meditations of him were indeed sweet!" Let then the recollection of these comforts animate you in the use of every suitable means. Beware of being hurried away by the rapid tide of worldly things. Endeavour to row out of the midst of the current into still water, to escape surrounding dangers. Quit, as often as you can, the bustle, confusion, and interruption of the crowd, for the tranquillity of the shade. With a Bible in your hand, seek the refuge of calm, undisturbed retirement. If business must have a great proportion of your time, still labour to secure, sometimes, an hour for sweet meditation. Call in your scattered thoughts, and accustom them to dwell on heavenly things: "The zeal," says Baxter, "which is kindled by your meditations on heaven, will be a heavenly zeal. While others, like Baal's priests, are ready to cut themselves, because their sacri-

fice will not burn; thou mayest breathe the spirit of Elijah, and in the chariot of contemplation soar aloft till thy soul and thy sacrifice gloriously flame, though the flesh and the world should cast upon them all the water of their opposing enmity. Say not, how shall mortals ascend to Heaven? Faith hath wings, and meditation is its chariot. Faith is a burning glass to thy sacrifice, and meditation sets it to the face of the sun; only take it not away too soon, but hold it there awhile, and thy soul will feel the happy effect." Reader, weigh well this momentous part of our subject. Remember, that the word of God supplies the food, which, if digested by holy meditation, never fails to give health and prosperity to the soul.

2. As means to endear the precious Saviour, watchfulness and prayer may be recommended.

In proportion to the placid and well-regulated frame of the heart will be the measure of our best comforts. But how many things daily arise to unhinge our thoughts, to ruffle and discompose our tempers, and to pollute and embitter our life. Hence the need of our Lord's command, "Watch and pray."

Would you live under the cheering influence of the Saviour's love? watch over the roving thoughts, and restless passions within. Have you not found by experience the truth of the

prophet's words, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?" Who but the all-seeing Jehovah can penetrate its depth, and fully know it? How suitable and how needful then is the wise man's counsel, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

Watch and guard against being drawn aside, and entangled by things of time and sense. The world, with its benumbing touch, deadens the heart to God. The cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, are apt to choke the growth of every heavenly principle. It is allowable, and often necessary, to engage in temporal concerns; but we are continually liable to be insensibly drawn from things lawful to things dangerous. The line, which marks the path in which we should go, is a narrow line, and may, through carelessness, be transgressed before we are aware; and then the steps are short and easy from one sinful indulgence to another, in the rapidly descending road that leadeth to destruction. This consideration adds great weight to the apostolic injunction, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The children of darkness give themselves up to slumber in slothful ease, or sensual indulgence; but let the children of the light not

sleep as do others, but watch and be sober. The more a saint is raised above the world, the nearer will he live to God, and the more precious will Christ be to his soul.

Watch and guard against the temptations of Satan. This subtle enemy possesses a large store of devices; and you are continually exposed to danger from his fair allurements and his fiery darts. And can you remain indifferent and unconcerned? Surely the animating call of the apostle ought to arouse the mind to repel the insidious and mighty foe. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith." With watchfulness, prayer must be united. To watch without praying, or pray without watching, is to resemble a sentinel, who either keeps his post all alert, but neglects to put on his armour; or wears his armour, but slumbers till surprised and overpowered by the enemy.

Perhaps there is no other duty enjoined in so many clear and urgent commands, and accompanied with so great a variety of animating and impressive promises, as prayer. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened." "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and

supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And to show that this was not to be merely occasional, but habitual, it is said, "Pray without ceasing." "Continue instant in prayer." Nor is it without cause that the Scriptures so frequently enforce the observance of this duty, and point out the advantages which flow from it. The vital power of religion cannot be preserved in the soul without prayer. When the spirit of devotion ceases to breathe, every Christian grace will begin to languish, and the best consolations lose their relish. Prayer, therefore, ought to be considered as a duty, which we are conscientiously to perform; and as a privilege, that we are invited freely to enjoy. Prayer loosens the burthen under which the soul groans; and vents the swelling sorrows of the troubled breast. "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path," &c. Ps. cxlii, 1, 2, 3. Prayer is that exercise of godliness which fits the saint to fight the good fight of faith. When girded with the whole armour of God, in order to use it with success, he is exhorted to pray always with all

prayer and supplication in the spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance. Prayer is the opened medium of intercourse between earth and heaven. It is in this way we are admitted to the exalted honour of holding fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Are not these powerful motives to unwearied supplication? Perhaps I may here appeal with good effect to your experience. Have you not found prayer a means suited at once to draw up your affections to heaven, and bring down a measure of heavenly bliss into the soul? Have you not often had the humblest ideas of self, and the highest thoughts of Jesus, while on your knee? Have you not sometimes entered the closet languid and heavy laden, and soon found, in the exercise of devotion, your soul like the chariot of Elijah, in swift and sweet motion towards God? Is it not by earnestly looking at Jesus, that you feel longing desires to be more conformed to his image here, and finally advanced to his glory hereafter? Jacob, by wrestling, had power as a prince with God, and prevailed. And after he had obtained the blessing that he sought, he called that place *Peniel*, which means presence of God, to perpetuate the remembrance of so distinguishing a favour. In answer to earnest prayer, the penitent malefactor received the full assurance

of acceptance from the lips of our expiring Saviour: "Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." When Paul was severely tried with a thorn in the flesh, buffeted by a messenger of Satan, he says, "For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Such an animating answer encouraged him to say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Be frequent then at a throne of grace. How much greater is the privilege of access to God, than if you had liberty to go at any hour into the presence of the highest and best monarch on earth. Cry to God, with filial confidence, for the special manifestations of his grace. Wrestle with holy importunity, and you will assuredly win the blessing. Remember the promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will do it." Try, and trust this word. Plead it continually in all your prayers.

3. As a means of endearing the precious Saviour, may be recommended, well-regulated Christian conversation.

Religion does not sternly forbid, or morosely sour the pleasures of sociability. It requires indeed, as might be expected, that we should select

our companions with care, and regulate our intercourse according to the principles and spirit of the Gospel. A Christian may, by various concerns of business, be called to mix with the world, and occasionally witness many of its enormities. But it is not in the company of men, whose discourse turns chiefly on the projects of towering ambition, the schemes of deep policy, and the base excesses, or gilded refinements of sensual pleasure, that he expects to have his mind enlightened, his faith strengthened, his hope enlivened, and his joy increased. In this turbulent element his soul cannot live and grow in holiness and comfort. He deems it a privilege to be rescued from the strife of tongues, and cries, in the language of the Psalmist, "Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. Better indeed is it for a good man to dwell in the wilderness, than to be continually vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked."

It is said by the prophet, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name." Mal. iii, 17. Happy is that circle of friends where the wonders of redeeming love form

the theme of their cheerful and instructive discourse! Happy are those seasons when believers can take sweet counsel together, and walk to the house of God in company! Many a winter's evening passes delightfully away, while persons of congenial spirit and piety tell each other "what God has done for their souls!" Nor will the imputation of fanaticism from a scornful world lessen the value of such society, or prevent those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious from seeking it. When Onesiphorus visited the city of Rome, no object of curiosity or interest in that splendid capital could divert his thoughts from incessant inquiries for Paul, who was a prisoner for the Gospel of Christ. "He sought him out very diligently and found him," and, no doubt, found in him a kindred spirit, and a joyful welcome. Who can describe the lively sympathy and sweet refreshment of such a meeting!

Do you esteem the saints as the "excellent of the earth, in whom is all your delight?" Are you, by deliberate choice, a companion of all those who fear God and keep his commandments? Then I may ask, have you not often proved the benefit of free and friendly intercourse with good men? Has not the image of Christ, seen in his followers, increased your love to the fair original, and made you more heartily magnify him as the brightness

of the Father's glory? Has not converse brought together, and animated to a glow, those live coals of zeal, which, if separate, would have become cold and dead? Have you not often been struck with surprise, and filled with encouragement, to find the conflicts and comforts of others so similar to your own? And do you not look back with regret on those social interviews, which have been wholly occupied on trivial topics? When by our conversation Christ is rendered more precious, his yoke more easy, his commands more joyous, we are truly benefited. Let us then take the directory of heaven to regulate our Christian fellowship. This unerring directory requires us to follow peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Thus we may often be able to adopt the language of the two disciples who were going to Emmaus: "Did not our hearts burn within us, while we talked with each other?" Let our speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that it may diffuse a savour of the knowledge of Christ wherever we go.

4. As a means of endearing the precious Saviour, there must be a strict conscientious attention paid to the public ordinances of Divine appointment. One duty must not set aside and displace another. Some, in cities and large

towns, are so much engaged in going from one place of worship to another, that they leave little or no time for closet and family devotion. Others, in the opposite extreme, though this is a much rarer case, from a love of reading and retirement, are in danger of neglecting public ordinances. God has graciously granted us a Sabbath, a Gospel ministry, and a house of prayer. How unspeakably important and valuable are these privileges!

Have you found rest to your soul in Christ Jesus? Then pray to be in the spirit of true devotion on the Lord's day, that you may enjoy in it an antepast of heaven. "There remaineth yet a rest, the keeping of a Sabbath, to the people of God," of which the sacred day is but a pledge and a forerunner. Yet many a saint has hailed the day on which Jesus arose, and cried, "This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Do you profess yourself a subject of Christ, the King of Zion? Ministers, as ambassadors for him, proclaim his Gospel, and unfold the terms of peace with God, and the way of salvation. It is their work and delight to speak of things touching the King, who is the sole head and ruler of his church. Do you wish him to reign in your heart without a rival? Would you by faith "see the

King in his beauty, and the heavenly land afar off?" Remember, he hath said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Animating words! Surely they ought to move us every time we enter the house of God, as if we heard them actually repeated in our ears by the voice of our beloved. The presence of Jesus in the midst of us! Stupendous mystery! The very thought of such a privilege ought to inspire us with deeper reverence, and higher joys, than if cherubic legions visibly hovered around us, with benign compassion and celestial glory in their looks! Nor is the Saviour's cheering promise liable to a failure in its fulfilment. Where his saints meet his special presence is felt, pouring forth the "spirit of grace and supplication," sweetening the melody of praise, and giving unction and power to the word of eternal life. "Shall we then forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is?" God forbid! Our experience enables us to understand that remarkable passage, Psalm lxxxix, 15, 16. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound! They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

There is one institution of public worship yet so much neglected, that I think it proper particularly to notice it; I mean the Lord's supper. It was solemnly appointed by the Redeemer just before his last conflict. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." And why do so many, even serious Christians, entirely neglect this ordinance? The words addressed to Naaman by his servants, on a certain occasion, had the keen edge of reproof, and all the force of reason: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he saith to thee, wash and be clean?" When the end is great, shall it be lost because the means are easy and at hand? "Do this in remembrance of me." And surely every thing Jesus did, every thing he suffered, and every word he said, ought to be embalmed in our memories, should all things else be forgotten. "Among the ordinances," says Dr. Clarke, "prescribed by the Gospel, that, com-

monly called the sacrament of the Lord's supper, has ever held a distinguished place; and the church of Christ has in all ages represented the due religious celebration of it as a duty incumbent on every soul that professed faith in Christ Jesus, and sought for salvation in his blood alone. Hence, it was ever held in the highest estimation and reverence; and the great High Priest of his church showed, by more than ordinary influences of his blessed Spirit on the souls of the faithful, that they had not mistaken his meaning, nor believed in vain; while by eating of that bread, and drinking of that cup, they endeavoured to show forth his death, and realise the benefits to be derived from it." Those who in a proper manner approach the sacramental table, discerning by faith the Lord's body, seldom fail to obtain comfort from it. Jesus is still often made known to his followers in the breaking of bread. These are some of the means which have a tendency to render the Saviour precious to those who believe. I cannot, however, conclude this chapter, without drawing the substance of it into a narrower compass, and endeavouring to present it in a more impressive form.

It is possible that these pages may fall into the hands of some, who have lived in the total neglect of the means here recommended. Should you,

reader, be one of that careless and hardened class, let me affectionately entreat you to think upon your sin and danger. How awful is your state! "You love darkness rather than light." The lively oracles of truth are to you as the "words of a book that is sealed." Your ears are uncircumcised, and cannot hearken; "the word of the Lord is a reproach to you, and you have no delight in it." So far from meditating on the things of Christ, you have not had one serious thought about death, eternity, and the day of judgment. You have been watching for iniquity, eager to catch every occasion of committing and concealing it, rather than watching to avoid the inroads of temptation, and the incitements to sin. Perhaps, instead of praying for the saving mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, you have been pouring out horrid oaths, and calling upon the Almighty to damn your soul. The Lord's day is given up to dissipation and vice, and every thing sacred treated with contempt. Is this a true statement of your case, a faithful delineation of your character? Are you deaf to the sound of the Gospel, turning intended blessings into curses, and "rejecting the counsel of God against yourself?" Instead of Christ being precious to you, "you are trampling under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant an unholy

thing." And how shall I speak, or how will you bear to hear of the inevitable consequence? If you continue in this thoughtless, hardened state to the last, "there remaineth nothing but a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation." By every thing venerable in the sanctions of divine authority; by every thing terrible in the kindling flames of divine wrath; by every thing melting in the superaboundings of infinite compassion and eternal love, let me beseech you to consider your ways, and "be reconciled to God." Notwithstanding your provocations have been multiplied almost beyond number, the door of mercy is not shut and barred against you, nor the means of grace for ever taken away. But if you determine, fortified in the triple shield of enmity, presumption, and infidelity, to go on in the course of this world, despising God, and lightly esteeming the rock of salvation, you will one day have to meet a sentence that will pierce your soul with unutterable agony, and sink it into absolute despair.

It may be that you, my reader, attend to the means of grace, but merely in an irregular, inconstant way, and in a lukewarm spirit.

You are far from denying the Gospel, and equally far from receiving the truth in the love of

it. You, perhaps, rarely take up the word of God to read; and when you do, a feather, an atom, a shadow has power to divert your attention from it. Calm, serious, heavenly meditation, is an exercise of mind to which you are quite a stranger. And when you use the words of prayer "you draw nigh to God with your lips, while your heart is far from him."

Brought up in a Christian country, you entertain and express in general terms a respect for the religion of Jesus. This disposition may sometimes lead you under the preaching of the Gospel. But of what avail are these things, while you have "not the love of God and the spirit of Christ in you?" When you engage in any of the solemn concerns of religion, oh think of the deep interest you have in them! God has not only required you to learn his will, to seek his face, to believe in his Son, and to ask his holy Spirit, but he has expressly required the heart in all these duties. "Then you shall find him, when you seek him with all your heart."

Should you, my reader, be one of those happy persons, who have found the preciousness of Christ, and daily attend to the means which endear him to your heart, I am persuaded you will suffer the word of exhortation.

Be more intimately acquainted with the volume of inspiration. The holy Scripture is a faithful mirror, which reflects the glory of Immanuel. The ark of the covenant of old, contained the eternal law written in tables of stone; the ever-blooming rod of Aaron; and the golden pot of uncorrupted manna. But the Scripture contains far richer treasures than these. Here the law is exhibited as fulfilled in the person and work of Christ; or, to use the apostle's words, "here is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." Here the glorious and unchangeable priesthood of Jesus is made manifest. Here is found the imperishable manna, which supplies the church through the wilderness. It was death to look into the ark; but it is life to look by faith into this depository of heavenly blessings, the Bible. Would you escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust? Stand upon your watch-tower. Take heed that the enemy does not by his wiles ensnare you. Would you enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son? Then give yourselves more to meditation and prayer. These mutually aid each other. Hence David said, "While I was musing the fire burned, then spake I with my tongue." In a word, consider reading and hearing the Gospel, prayer, fellowship, and

ordinances, as channels through which the great Head of the church hath, in all ages, been pleased to dispense his favours. These channels are not worn out and obstructed by time, yet beware that you do not rely upon them and forget the fountain.

CHAP. VI.

ON THE EVIDENCES THAT CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO THE SOUL.

Of all errors, those which affect our eternal interests are the most to be dreaded. To entertain a favourable opinion of our own state, without just ground, is the worst species of self-deception. The bare possibility of such self-deception ought to lead us to try our characters by the unerring word of truth. Nor let the natural reluctance which we feel to this duty make us decline or delay it. The exhortation of the apostle is here appropriate, and, by the strong language in which it runs, shows the need of our attending to it. "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" 2 Cor. xiii, 5. I shall therefore endeavour to point out some of the principal evidences of an interest in Christ.

One evidence that Christ is precious to us is a growing conformity to him. To suppose that Jesus may be endeared to us, without our being in some measure conformed to him, is equally contrary to reason, scripture, and experience. Let analogy here supply illustration. "The study of man (says Lavater) is the doctrine of unisons and discords between ourselves and others." If we greatly admire and ardently love a friend, it is natural to wish his company, and to drink into his sentiments, and to imitate his example. And can we supremely love and revere the blessed Redeemer; can we steadily contemplate his matchless excellencies, and hold frequent and delightful communion with him, without being in some degree assimilated to him? What! is it possible to admire and not imitate; or habitually to imitate, and not bear some traces of resemblance to him? No, the fervid flame of holy affection to Jesus will ever have a transforming influence. Such is the frame of human nature, that the objects which we chiefly love will not fail to stamp, or at least invariably indicate, the leading traits in our characters.

That an interest in Christ must be inseparably joined with a conformity to him, appears strictly agreeable to the language of the Scripture. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old

things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. v, 17. This remarkable passage makes it evident, that the man, who has become a true Christian, has undergone, not a partial and temporary, but a thorough and permanent change. He has a new heart, new principles, new motives, new desires, new pleasures, new objects of pursuit, new subjects for reflections, new grounds of hope and springs of consolation. Hence the believer is required to "cast off the works of darkness, and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ." In complying with this command he not only promotes his own welfare, but also reflects honour on the profession of the Gospel. Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians, uses still plainer language to the same purpose, saying, "Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

Our experience also proves, that the more Christ is endeared to us, the more we shall be conformed to him.

The moon, and all the planets, shine not by their own light, but by a splendour borrowed from the sun. So Christians derive the whole measure of their light and grace from the glorious Redeemer; and, as they live nearer to him, shine with more conspicuous lustre, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Humility,

meekness, love, and all the train of attractive graces and virtues, in this way adorn the character of the believer. The saint well knows, that wandering thoughts, fretful tempers, carnal passions, and worldly anxieties, tend to embitter his comforts and darken his hopes.

Reader, examine yourself. Whose image and superscription do you bear? Remember, every true Christian has received the impress of the Saviour's moral likeness; or, as it is said, "is renewed in knowledge and holiness, after the image of Him that created him." Have you imbibed the amiable tempers and heavenly dispositions of Jesus? "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The brightest talents and the most zealous profession avail nothing while the heart is unchanged. It is expressly declared, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit."

Do you follow Christ, daily endeavouring to mark and pursue his steps? No other pattern is so deserving of imitation. If then you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, be careful to walk even as he walked. Be a living epistle of Christ, known and read of all. If you keep near to Jesus, and grow in conformity to him, your evidence of an interest in his salvation will be clear and satisfying to your own mind. But those who are

conscious, that their aims are low and selfish, their tempers and dispositions unsanctified, and their conduct loose and vicious, have no scriptural ground to conclude they are yet made partakers of Christ. We look in vain for the Saviour's image in such persons. Not one line or faint feature of resemblance can be found. Nay, where pride reigns in the heart, where malice and envy work, where lying and deceit habitually prevail, there are strong marks of likeness to Satan. He, who knew what was in man, said to the wicked Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." What an awful state is this! Surely it nearly concerns every one to know his true character; whether Christ be formed in him the hope of glory, or he be led captive by the devil at his will.

2. Another evidence, that Christ is precious to us, is a willingness to make every sacrifice which the profession of his name requires.

Is any thing too valuable to be relinquished for Christ? Can the flattering prospect, or full possession of worldly power, honour, emolument, and pleasure, indemnify the soul for the loss of its salvation? Is not the sum total of all earthly bliss, light and worthless in the estimate of the believer, compared with an interest in Christ?

Yet how many refuse, at the command of the Gospel, to part with the idols which they have set up in their hearts! How many prefer their farms, their merchandize, and their amusements, to the one thing needful! The necessity of making every thing yield, to become secondary and subservient to the cause of true religion, is so strongly asserted and clearly settled in the Gospel, as to leave no room for the shadow of a doubt. The words of our great Master ought to outweigh a thousand pretended difficulties and objections, which carnal policy may throw into the opposite scale. "If any man come unto me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." It is hardly necessary to say, that this does not imply that we should do or wish evil to our parents, or other relatives, for we are forbidden to bear ill-will even to our enemies. It does, however, imply, that whenever the dearest ties of nature clash with the known commands of Christ, the former must give way to the latter. If we cannot please both our friends and the Saviour, we must prefer the claims of heaven to those of earth, the concerns of the soul to those of the body. This sense of the above-mentioned remarkable passage is confirmed by the parallel place, Mat. x, 37,

"He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Nor let any murmur, crying, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" To human nature in its unrenewed state it is, indeed, utterly impracticable; but we have in the sacred records several memorable examples in which this precept was fulfilled. "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of reward." Heb. xi, 24, 25, 26.

Was it not a magnanimous conduct to cast in his lot with the despised saints of God, rather than shine in all the splendour of a monarch's palace? Was it not a just estimate, a wise choice, to prefer the riches of Christ to Egypt's best possessions? Was it not a noble and profitable exchange, to give up the short-lived pleasures of sin for the recompense of an eternal reward?

Another instance equally worthy of notice is the apostle Paul. It is hardly possible to put

together more strong, decisive language, than he uses. When all the advantages of birth and education; all his civil and religious privileges are presented in one full view; he says, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." When called to make a sacrifice of those things, which he had before so highly esteemed and valued, he did it without any lingering hesitation, or drawback of sinful regret. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss, of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ," Phil. iii, 7, 8. Nor was this a transient flash of zeal; he retained his firmness to the last, and sealed his testimony for Jesus with his blood. And long since the apostolic age, there have been found many so ardently attached to the Saviour and his truth as to make a voluntary sacrifice of the best earthly comforts, rather than either deny him or desert his cause. When Luther, the brightest luminary of the reformation, was summoned before the diet at Worms, his friends, apprehending the great danger to which he would be exposed, endeavoured to dissuade him; but he answered, "I am called by the providence of God to go, and I will go, though there be as many devils in

Worms as tiles upon the houses." When brought into the assembly, and required to recant, he calmly, yet boldly maintained his principles, and concluded by solemnly declaring, "I cannot, I dare not, I will not submit to any thing which appears unsupported by the will of God."

From the noble army of martyrs a great number might easily be introduced. I shall here just mention two.

John Lambert suffered in the year 1538. No man was used at the stake with more cruelty than this martyr. They burned him in a slow fire by inches, for if it kindled higher and stronger than they chose, they took it away. When his legs were burnt off, and his thighs were mere stumps in the fire, they pitched his body upon pikes, and lacerated his broiling flesh with their halberts. But God was with him in the midst of the flame, and supported him in all the anguish of nature. Just before he expired, he lifted up such hands as he had, all flaming with fire, and cried out to the people with his dying voice, "None but Christ: none but Christ."

Mr. Lawrence Saunders was executed Feb. 8, 1555. When he came to the place, he fell on the ground and prayed, and then arose and took the stake in his arms to which he was to be chained, and kissed it, saying, "Welcome the cross of Christ: welcome everlasting life."

Such seasons of persecution bring the professions of attachment to Christ to a severe test. By these storms the chaff is separated from the wheat. We live in milder times, and never yet saw the fires of Smithfield kindled to consume martyrs. Yet we may ask, Has the offence of the cross entirely ceased? We might as well ask, Is the enmity of the carnal mind quite extinct? No; as of old, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now. In our happy land, the heavy artillery of persecution has long since ceased to alarm and agitate the nation with its tremendous shocks. But are not the light weapons of ridicule, and the poisoned darts of calumny, employed to gall and harass those, whom the laws do not permit to be dragged to prisons and stakes? Where is the Christian, who has any thing to do with the world, that has not, in a greater or less degree, to bear the reproach of the cross?

You may never, reader, be called, for the cause of religion, to hazard life, to endure the spoiling of your goods, or to flee from city to city, to escape the bigot's torch, or the tyrant's chain. But are you ready to sacrifice whatever does now stand in competition with your attachment to the Redeemer? Do you give him the first place in your affections, and make every thing else bow

to his will? Is it the wish and prayer of your heart, that every idol, however dear, may be torn away, and all the powers within you give homage to the Prince of Peace? Are you willing "your name should be cast out as evil in the world, if it be found in the book of life?" Are you fully prepared to "go forth without the camp, bearing the Saviour's reproach?" Can you meet, without shrinking, the hard speeches of the ungodly, rather than basely renounce, or disingenuously conceal your Christian profession! If, for the Lord's sake, you freely resign the things of the world, deny self, and proceed with boldness to cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, to you he is indeed precious.

3. Another evidence, that Christ is precious to us, is a readiness to manifest our love to him by a course of active, cheerful, universal, and unwearied obedience to his commands.

The Christian is under the supreme authority of his Divine Master, and is therefore called to exemplify his precepts. It is not enough to endure with fortitude privations and sufferings for his sake, when necessary; we must also engage in every service he enjoins, with active zeal and steady diligence. No talent is given us to be laid up in a napkin, no faculty ought to be unemployed, no gift unimproved, no relative

duty knowingly omitted, nor opportunity of usefulness carelessly neglected. "Being purchased with blood, all the members of the body, and all the powers of the soul, should be yielded up to God." Hence Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Doubtless we should keep them as a treasure laid up in the heart; keep them as a rule always at hand to direct our way. These striking words of our Saviour demand most serious attention. They afford us a criterion or mark, by which we may safely judge ourselves, to ascertain whether the creature or the Creator, the world or the Redeemer, sways the affections. It is not said, if ye love me, take my name, hear my commands; but take my yoke upon you, keep my commands. Now, as a considerable proportion of those commands are of a practical nature, this test of attachment will therefore always be disliked by those, who in words profess Christ, but in works deny him. We may, however, rest fully assured, that, where there are no *fruits of righteousness*, there can be no root of genuine piety. What would be thought of that man, who, while he professed loyalty and affection to the king, continued in the grossest manner to trample upon his laws? Would it not subject him justly to the charge of rebellion, aggravated by the vilest dissimulation? The

same thing may be asserted of those who exalt Christ in words, and dishonour him by their conduct. He repels the confidence of such vain self-deceivers, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

Nor is it enough, that there be obedience to the Saviour's commands, unless it be prompt and cheerful. A slave may perform his task to avoid the smarting lash, though he hates both his work and his master. Thus a man in bondage under the law, driven by the scourges of a guilty conscience, sometimes attends a little to the practical part of religion, which is felt every moment to be a tiresome task, or grievous kind of drudgery. Such a forced, reluctant compliance with Gospel precepts, as springs wholly from servile fear, can neither be acceptable to God, nor an evidence of interest in Christ. A believer under the guidance of truth, and the impulse of love, is to be "ready to every good word and work." And when obedience in any one is excited by proper motives, it will be distinguished by cheerful alacrity. The natural language of such a heart will be, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. Blessed Saviour! thy commands to me are not grievous, but joyous. Thy yoke I have found to be easy, and I delight to wear it. Oh may I be enabled daily to follow thee, and

deem it 'my meat and drink to do the will of my Father!' May I be filled with 'the fruits of righteousness, to the praise of God.'"

Love to Jesus will produce universal obedience to his commands.

There were some Jews, of old, whom God by the prophet charged as "partial in his laws." They performed that part which suited their fancies or interest. But the Psalmist could say, "I have esteemed thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." Every injunction in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is stamped with the same divine authority, and consequently demands submission and obedience. "Whosoever, therefore, shall break the least of the commandments, and teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." When we open the Gospel, we find there enjoined duties which regard ourselves, our fellow creatures, and our God. We are required "to cast down imaginations and high thoughts; to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; and to exercise ourselves daily unto godliness." We are exhorted to render to all our fellow-men their *due;* to be respectful and submissive to superiors; affable and unassuming with equals; kind and condescending to inferiors; just, benevolent, and, as far as possible, useful to all. We

are commanded "to yield ourselves up to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and to do all things to promote his glory." Where a sincere and lively affection to Christ rules in the heart, there will not be a wish, that one of these commands should be blotted out, or made void by wilful negligence.

The Christian's practical obedience must not only extend to all the precepts of Christ, but also run through every period of his life. Having his heart enlarged by the grace of God, his chief concern is "to run in the way of his commands." But this race requires perseverance. Too many begin, and "for a time run well," who afterward fall away. "Be not weary in well-doing," is therefore, at all times, a very needful admonition. The more uniformly, consistent, and exemplary, is the conduct of a believer, the clearer will his evidence be of an interest in the precious Saviour. "Where there is fruit unto holiness, the end must be everlasting life." Think, my reader, whether you have this evidence: do you, without endeavouring to cramp or mangle it by narrow and violent modes of interpretation, receive the whole body of revealed truth, embracing with equal readiness the precepts and the promises? "Do you exercise yourself daily, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God

and towards man." A good servant watches his master's eye, attentively listens to his call, and flies on the wings of promptitude and zeal to execute his orders. Now, when Paul speaks of the Saviour, he says, "Whose I am, and whom I serve;" the latter is the proof of the former. Do you feel it a duty and an honour "to serve the Lord Christ?" Are you persuaded, that the Christian's life must be a life of activity and usefulness? Are you filled with grief and shame at the remembrance of your negligence and unprofitableness? Do you look back with deep regret, not only on the blots, but also on the blanks of your past life? Do you set before you the fairest examples of cheerful, active piety, and tread in their steps, according to the injunction, "Be ye followers of them who inherit the promises?" Then to you Christ is certainly precious. The ancient pharisees wore the precepts of the law in broad phylacteries; but the commands of the Gospel, that they may evidence our adoption, and ornament our character, must be reduced into practice, and interwoven in the whole texture of life.

4. Another evidence that Christ is precious to us, is an ardent, undissembled love to his people.

Our views of the Redeemer will, in a consi-

derable measure, influence our regard to his true followers. This criterion cannot fail, for it is expressly said, "Whosoever loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." The various privileges, the severe trials, and the tender relations of Christians, have a tendency to endear them to each other. Are not all equally purchased with the precious blood of Christ? Oh, what a price was paid for their redemption! Are not all equally "accepted in the Beloved, in whose perfect righteousness they will be presented at last without spot and blemish?" Are not all equally partakers of the same rich saving grace? Would you then intentionally offend one of those for whom Christ died, and who shall for ever reign with him? The various trials of Christians have a tendency to endear them to each other. Have not all good men frequent reason to exclaim, "Without are fightings, within are fears?" Their circumstances widely differ, but in regard to the bitterness of sin, struggles with temptation, and opposition from the world, their experience bears a strong resemblance. And surely, the consideration that we are passing together through the same changing scenes, exposed alike to the same difficulties and dangers, should feed the springs of sympathy, and foster those meltings of fellow-feeling, and those sensi-

ments of mutual kindness, which lighten the load of affliction, and blunt the edge of calamity. Do not all true Christians stand in the same tender and endearing relations? "There is but one faith, one Lord, one baptism." They are servants of one master, children of one father, members of one body. They all travel the same way, fight the same good fight, look to the same source of supply, and the same object of hope. "They do all eat the same spiritual meat, and all drink the same spiritual drink." Are not all these motives to reciprocal affection?

It is by this even the world are able to form a judgment of us. Hence the Saviour says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." Are the proofs of our regard to the members of Christ made strikingly manifest? Do we relieve them in poverty, and succour them in distress?" "Do we weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that do rejoice?" The man who goes no farther than verbal professions of esteem and affection to the saints; who flutters round them in the sunshine of prosperity, but flies off when the stormy blasts of trouble come, may have the name, but has "not the spirit of Christ." "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the

love of God in him?" We might as well ask, how can fire burn in a rock of ice? Such a glaring deficiency in the practical part of religion shows, that its essential principles have neither power nor place in the heart. If there be no love to true Christians, there is none to their Master; and, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." The conclusion, however awful, is inevitable; for Christ accounts injuries or kindnesses, done to his people, as done to himself. No tear of tenderness, poured out in the chamber of affliction, is overlooked; no instance of self-denial to assist the needy shall be forgotten by him. "Whosoever shall give even a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose his reward." Many tender expressions of good will, and noble acts of liberality towards the poor, despised, afflicted followers of Jesus, which are unknown to the world, are well known to him, and will be honourably distinguished by his approbation in the last day. "Then shall the King say to those on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink; a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me;

I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? or naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," Matt. xxv, 34—40.

As it is by this evidence of love to each other that the world will judge us, so by the same test we may judge of our own state. "If a man say I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar; for if he love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Let us examine ourselves, and see whether we can abide this test. Can we say, "we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren?" If, which is not unlikely, we feel some kind of attachment to Christians, is it from a proper principle? Does it produce its natural and lovely fruits? Is it daily growing in strength and vigour? Do we affectionately regard them, not on account of their affluent circumstances, or the influence which

they possess, and willingly exert, to advance our temporal interests, but for all the lovely graces and virtues of undissembled piety? Do we esteem them in proportion as they resemble Jesus, in all his imitable excellencies? Do we in various ways study to show the love we bear to the true disciples of Jesus? Occasions will not be long wanting, if earnestly sought. There are brethren weak in faith, who need to be strengthened, wanderers to be reclaimed, and mourners to be comforted.

Now, reader, let conscience faithfully apply the subject. Do you seek or shun the society of the saints? Would you prefer a humble, obscure station with the people of God, to the most magnificent splendour of the wicked? Do you, as one says, account the midnight of the saint better than the mid-day of the sinner? Perhaps, when every other evidence of an interest in Christ appears to fail, you still feel this attachment to believers, and therefore take encouragement to hope that you shall reign with them for ever? Perhaps you answer, "Yes; my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. Oh thou who hast said, 'All my churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts,' I appeal to thee, thou knowest I desire to cleave to

thee as my Redeemer, my portion, and my all. I esteem it an unspeakable privilege to have a name and a place among thy people. I love them that love thee; yea, I love them and will own them, when they are most cruelly hated and vilified by an injurious world. Should I meet an utter stranger, from the remotest regions of the earth, in the lowest circumstances of poverty and wretchedness, who loves and follows the Lamb, I could welcome him to my arms, and press him to my heart as a friend and a brother, and shed over him tears of sympathy and joy." Such a tender, holy, fervent affection to the saints, is a pregnant proof that you have experienced the preciousness of Christ. Seek a larger measure of that divine influence, which refines every social principle, and gives brotherly love its life and energy. Hence Peter says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

5. Another evidence that Christ is precious to us, is an earnest desire, and constant endeavour to bring others acquainted with his preciousness.

You cannot enjoy the blessedness which there is in Jesus, without longing to see others made

partakers of it. Have you ungodly relations? your bowels of compassion will yearn over them, and your fervent supplications be poured forth on their behalf; you will wish with far more solicitude to promote their spiritual welfare than to advance their worldly interests. This solicitude will prompt you to study a thousand ways, and gladly use every probable means to impress their minds, and affect their hearts with the necessity of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Are you a husband? you will try by counsel and persuasion, by kind treatment and chaste, discreet conversation, to win the unbelieving wife. Or are you a wife? you will endeavour, by the most wise and gentle means, to win the husband. Are you a parent? methinks I hear the devout and affectionate prayers which you breathe out at a throne of grace for your offspring. "Oh that my children might live; live to God here, and reign with Jesus hereafter! Oh that all the family, which God hath graciously given me, may belong to the household of faith! Father of mercies! let them be as olive-plants around my table, as trees of righteousness in the courts of thy house, to be at last transferred to the fair paradise above, there to flourish in eternal bloom!" If you have an

Isaac, born of the Spirit, or a Mary, who hath chosen the good part, the very thought will make the heart bound with pleasure; yet you cannot slacken in your prayers and endeavours, while there is one Ishmael in the flesh. What generous love and unwearied zeal did Paul manifest for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh! Though they persecuted him with all the implacable malignity of enraged furies, and left no arts untried to compass his ruin, his heart's desire and prayer to God for them was, that they might be saved.

Do your neighbours despise the Gospel and neglect the great salvation? Do they set at nought the great foundation, the chief corner stone, which God hath chosen as the only ground of hope? Do they nurse the prejudices of ignorance and enmity, and labour to rivet the fetters of bondage? You will feel for them, and use every faithful, every prudent, yea, every possible method of seasonable admonition and tender entreaty, to convince them of their danger, and point them to the only safe refuge.

Do you go much into the world? Your spirit will be stirred in you with holy indignation to see the aboundings of wickedness, which, like resistless torrents, break down all restraints, and

diffuse mischief and misery through the earth. It will grieve you to witness the profanation of God's holy name, the contempt cast upon his word, and the shameful abuse of his goodness and mercy. You will pity the thoughtless, inconsiderate creatures, who are boldly rushing on to ruin and endless woe. Even your worst enemies, who hate you without cause, and endeavour to injure you whenever they can, will have a share in your best wishes and earnest prayers.

How can a man who knows Christ, and the power of his resurrection, sit down in selfish indifference, while thousands are "perishing for lack of knowledge?" Can he "who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, see others feeding, like the prodigal, on husks, without wishing them the enjoyment of spiritual blessings?" Impossible. It is the very nature of the Gospel to produce, as well as to proclaim, "good will to men." No sooner did Philip become a follower of Christ, than he said to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." The woman of Samaria "left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" Ministers, indeed, are sent forth for the express pur-

pose "of showing men the way of salvation." It is their special employ "to warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom, that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." But ought not love to Jesus, and compassion for souls, so far to influence us, as to make every Christian a monitor to his fellow-men? Surely pity should excite prayer, and prayer be accompanied with the unabated use of those means which God has provided to bring men to the knowledge of the truth. Bad men vie with each other in activity to ruin precious souls. "They draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope." They contrive a thousand plans, exhaust all their arts to allure, and exert all their efforts to impel others along with them, in the broad road that leadeth to destruction. How much more then ought Christians to labour, that those who are strangers to God, and the commonwealth of Israel, may be brought to enjoy the "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

And now, reader, ask your own heart, whether these sentiments habitually influence it? Do you long and labour to bring others to an experimental acquaintance wtth the preciousness of Christ? Do you rejoice when favourable events in the dis-

pensations of Providence open a way for the Gospel to spread in dark, idolatrous lands? Do you daily pray that ministers of ability and piety may be multiplied; "that" as God hath given the word, great may be the company of those who publish it?" Do you wrestle with God in supplication, that their souls may be enlightened and invigorated, and their work crowned and blessed by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit? When a stout-hearted, rebellious sinner is penetrated, softened, and subdued by Divine grace, so as to begin to cry, "What shall I do to be saved?" does a livelier and sublimer sensation of pleasure thrill through your heart to witness such a change, than if you heard of the most splendid national victory? If some, who once appeared promising, should seem to waver in doubt, or to turn again to the weak and beggarly elements of the world, do you with deep solicitude travail in birth, as it were, till Christ be formed in them? When the great variety of tempers, the strength of deep-rooted habits, and the inequality of circumstances among men are duly considered, do you see the need of wisely choosing, and prudently timing all your warnings, reproofs, counsels, and persuasions? It is in this way only that you can exemplify the exhortation

of Jude, "Of some have compassion, making a difference; others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." Such a spirit, as leads you earnestly to desire and seek the salvation of others, is a proof that you have found the Redeemer precious to your own soul.

CHAP. VII.

ON THE HAPPY STATE OF THE BELIEVER, WHO ENJOYS THE CONSOLATIONS THAT ARE IN CHRIST, CONTRASTED WITH THE STATE OF THE UNBELIEVER.

In the Holy Scriptures the characters and conditions of the righteous and the wicked are often in the most striking points of view contrasted with each other. "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord, but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." Thus saith the Lord, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord; for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inherit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for

he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth forth her roots by the river." We read, as descriptive representations, of the tares and the wheat, of jewels and of dross, of the "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, and the vessels of mercy prepared to glory."

What an awful contrast there is between the "citizens of Zion, and strangers who are afar off; between the friends of Christ, and the enemies of his cross; between the children of God, and the children of the devil!" I shall endeavour to show the opposite states of the saints and of the unregenerate sinner, with respect to their present enjoyments and their future condition.

1. In their present condition, the joys of one to whom Christ is precious are pure, free, satisfying, and permanent; while the pleasures of the unbeliever are polluted, forbidden of God, unsuitable to the soul, and of short continuance.

While the infatuated sinner rushes blindly on in his career of folly, he often wears an air of gaiety, and boasts of his heart's desire. Yet, at his best estate, he is little to be envied, as his happiness is drawn from tainted springs. Poison is poison still, though poured into a costly cup, and mingled with delicious sweets. How debasing and dangerous are the choicest pleasures of

vicious men! Sin contaminates, and ruins whatever it touches. Where this monster reigns, where this plague rages and spreads, there can be no salutary, refined joys. "Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and their conscience is defiled," Tit. i, 5. But view the sincere believer. His enjoyments are in their nature pure. When Christ is precious to the soul, the works of creation impart both instruction and delight. Ten thousand proofs of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness everywhere strike the senses. The order, extent, and magnificence of the heavens; the beauty and fertility of the earth; and the countless variety of animated tribes which fill every element, awaken lively and pleasing emotions in the devout breast. When the thoughts are calmly employed, intent in meditation, every field is a school, and every plant and insect a teacher to the Christian. How often does the language of the Psalmist express his feelings? "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches," Ps. civ, 24. When Christ is precious to the soul, there is a pure joy in contemplating the mysterious ways, and receiving the unnumbered bounties of Divine Providence. In the dispensations of that Being, who governs

heaven and earth, there are, it is true, some things which far surpass our feeble comprehension, yet we know enough to convince us that he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. While the "Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; for even when clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." O, how various and valuable are the mercies which our heavenly Benefactor bestows upon us! To him we are indebted for food, raiment, sleep, health, and every temporal comfort in our lot. But the pure pleasure with which a pious man receives the bounties of an indulgent Providence is heightened by a lively feeling of gratitude.

When Christ is precious to the soul, how pure is the joy which every new covenant privilege affords. Remission of sin, effectual calling, full acceptance and free communion with God, and the hope of everlasting life, are such blessings as cannot fail to gladden the heart, and open the richest springs of consolation. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." He, who knows by ex-

perience the blessedness described in these passages, may look with indifference on the highest worldly pleasures, and with heart-felt pity on their deluded followers.

Now, reader, of what nature is your joy? Is it low and selfish, or pure and sublime? The stream will resemble the fountain from which it flows. To centre all your hopes, and seek all your joys in the creature, indicates a grovelling mind and an unsanctified heart. On the contrary, a taste for pleasures, which are spiritual and refined, proves that your affections have a heavenly tendency. Happy is your state, if you "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

2. The enjoyments of the wicked are such as God hath prohibited, but those of the Christian are divinely free.

With what avidity and eagerness do men of corrupt minds pursue their pleasures. Nothing is thought too valuable to be sacrificed for them. And what are those pleasures? "Stolen waters, which a vitiated taste alone can account sweet; forbidden fruits, which by the alluring sophistry of the tempter are made to appear desirable to the eyes; unlawful delights, which cannot be obtained without breaking down that fence that is armed with the threatenings and

terrors of a jealous God." The worshipper of mammon, who sets his heart on his idol, and exults in the increase of his riches, as the Israelites danced round the golden calf; the pampered sensualist, or wanton debauchee, who gives the reins to his irregular passions and base lusts; the slave of ambition, who by all the artifices of low cunning and falsehood, presses forward into posts of power — these all pursue their gratifications under the solemn prohibition and dreadful frowns of Heaven. "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear," an awful voice declares, "Woe unto them that join house to house, and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, and the tabret, and the pipe, and wine, are in their feast, but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Isa. v, 8, 11, 12, 20. Thus it plainly appears, the boasted delights of the wicked are only corrupt and criminal pleasures. Men must burst through

all the restraints of lawful authority to reach them; and incur all the terrors of Divine wrath to enjoy them.

But see the believer to whom Christ is precious. His joys are perfectly free of access, and free from the intermixture of bitter regrets. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely," is an invitation, which sounds more sweetly than music in his ears. It is therefore "with joy, that he draws this water from the wells of salvation." No rigid prohibition, no flaming sword, no terrors set in array, prevent his approach to the tree of life. "He, calmly sits down under its shadow with great delight, and its fruit is sweet to his taste." The plenitude, variety, and suitableness of spiritual blessings, are in the Gospel represented under the figure of a royal feast. The King sends his servants to invite his guests. Too many, alas! refuse the gracious invitation. Wholly engrossed by business, or pleasure, they begin to make excuse, and thus return evil for good. But those who listen to the Divine call, and rejoice that there is yet room, are at once welcomed to the feast. There are no hard, impracticable conditions to perform; no tedious and difficult preparations to make; no expensive offerings, or meritorious services required, to gain admission. At this

feast, which is made for spiritual gladness, all, all is provided by the rich, unbounded grace of the King of Zion.

Besides, the enjoyments of the Christian are also free from those bitter regrets which attend sinful pleasures. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. I do not mean to intimate, that the believer is perfectly happy in this world. Alas! experience too feelingly evinces the contrary. Much remaining depravity, and many imperfections attend the best of saints while on earth. It is also the will of God, that they should be tried by various afflictions. Still, the Christian knows this, that his divine joy never turns to bitterness. He has none of those drawbacks and painful embarrassments, which attend the gay delights of the sinner. You do not hear him wishing that he had never known the pleasures of religion. You do not see him frantic with distraction and grief, and cursing the day in which he first began to seek and find satisfaction in the Gospel and its privileges. Those seasons of sweet enjoyment, which he has passed in communion with God, and his Son Jesus Christ, raise in the conscience no chilling horrors, nor pangs of remorse. No: when he grieves at all, it is not that he has tasted too freely the fruits and pleasures of religion; but rather, that he has lost

many precious comforts through inattention and carelessness. Spiritual blessings are indeed equally valuable at all times, though we are not always in a frame equally adapted to relish them. Mr. Scott, in his Essays, speaking of the joys which flow down from Christ, through the influence of the Spirit, justly observes, "It is the privilege of the believer exclusively to experience, relish, and value such joys; and to distinguish them from the joy of the hypocrite, which springs from ignorance, pride, and presumption: we are, therefore, exhorted to rejoice in the Lord always; and all our enfeebling dejection and sorrow are the consequences of living below our privileges, and coming short of our duty in this as well as in other respects. Especially we forfeit and mar this joy when we grieve the Spirit by our misconduct, or quench his holy influence by cleaving to the world, or by inexpedient self-indulgence; so that the apostle exhorts Christians "not to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess, from which others seek exhilaration, but to be filled with the Spirit."

Which now do you prefer, the pleasures of sin, or the free, unembittered pleasures of religion? Are you one who makes light of the Gospel and its rich provision, and yet eagerly indulges in every kind of corrupt and sensual joy? Consider,

what a curse God hath suspended on every branch of forbidden pleasure. How many eagerly seize the bait of temptation, regardless of the hook, which never fails to pierce them with the keenest anguish! How many have been dashed from the precipice, on which you now perhaps stand, into the depths of endless misery? Or are you, reader, one who tastes the preciousness of Christ, and always triumphs in the savour of his knowledge? Sensible that a mass of misery lies hid amidst the alluring scenes of the voluptuous, do you stand at a safe distance, crying in the language of the Psalmist, "Let me not eat of their dainties?" And when the sensual think it strange, "that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you;" would you rather bear their abuse than in a single instance give them the sanction of your encouragement? Do you think "a day in God's house better than a thousand?" Would you rather be a doorkeeper there, than dwell in the most splendid tents of wickedness? Go then to the source whence all your joys are supplied. There you are in no danger of excess. By drawing plentifully from this source you cannot exhaust it, nor be less amply supplied in days to come.

3. The enjoyments of the ungodly are unsuitable to the soul; but those of the believer are

adapted to impart full satisfaction. There ought to be a due proportion between the objects which we seek, and the faculties of the mind. To think that the capacious powers and ardent desires of the immortal soul can be filled and satisfied with merely temporal things, is as unreasonable, as to expect that the body can be fed and supported by air. This important truth is but too little weighed and applied. The restless cry of worldly men still is, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" They continue to seek the living among the dead, to look for substantial happiness in a region of shadows, and a settled calm in the troubled ocean. They do not consider that every flower hath a worm at its root, and what we most prize often gives us the most pain. Hence, says a judicious writer, "The generality of mankind persist in seeking their happiness from the same perishing objects, notwithstanding innumerable miscarriages and disappointments, which they rather choose to ascribe to accidental causes, than to any inherent imperfection in the things themselves. They cannot resist the persuasion, that riches, power, and sensual pleasures would yield them full contentment, provided certain untoward circumstances could be retrenched; and under this deception they return again and again to

their former purpose, in hope that by more skilful efforts they shall be able to overcome every adventitious obstruction, and extract that felicity which hitherto has eluded their pursuit." When the banquet is prepared, some unbending Mordecai, some thwarting event, sours all its sweets, and makes the miserable wretch exclaim, "All this availeth me nothing." Even the splendour and luxuries of a palace are too little to yield content, if the sickening eye of envy happen to fix on some poor Naboth's vineyard. Separate from the hopes and comforts of religion, every thing below the sun has written upon it, in legible characters, "vanity and vexation of spirit," though too few learn to read, or fully believe it.

Let us now examine the satisfactory enjoyments of the Christian. Ask him, "What think you of Christ?" He will answer, "Since I knew his preciousness, he is to me all in all. Yes, the Lord is my light and my salvation, the strength of my life, in whom all my springs are found. Ye glittering toys! Ye tempting sweets! Ye empty, worthless, delusive trifles! Your charms have lost their power! 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life

from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindnesses and tender mercies.' O blessed Saviour! How sweet are thy promises, how suitable to my case, how sure in their performance! I have found in thee all I want. Thou hast given me the lot of those who fear and serve thee. Thy pardoning grace hath blotted out my sins, rescued my soul from the brink of ruin, and raised me to a share in thy kingdom. Adorable and precious Redeemer! I am fully satisfied with the provisions of thy Gospel. I have tasted the heavenly manna, and would cry, Lord, evermore give me this bread. I know by experience, that whosoever 'drinketh of the water that thou givest, can never thirst again,' or seek, as he once did, the dangerous and polluted pleasures of sin." Such is the satisfaction, and such the grateful language of one who believeth in Jesus to the saving of the soul. Should it be said, do not uneasiness and sorrow often invade the breast of the saint? True, but not because he has found any deficiency in his Lord, any failure in his promises, or any want in the treasures of his heavenly Father's house. He is often dissatisfied with himself, never with his precious Saviour.

Have you, reader, found happiness in Christ, after every thing else failed to bestow it? Have you experienced a solid consolation and soul-

refreshing joy in the Gospel? If so, what cause have you to be unfeignedly thankful. Dwell then in a constant meditation on the excellency of Christ. Surely experience has convinced you, that your comfort depends on nearness to him. If you have been drawn aside, entangled, and distressed, return to your rest, to him who is the health of your countenance and your God. Or, do you try a thousand expedients to gain happiness in the pursuit of worldly pleasure, but in vain? Do you still find dregs of bitterness at the bottom of every cup? Have you found the joys of the world, and the flesh, like the broken, disordered scenes of a vision? And do you still continue to chase the airy phantoms with as much eagerness as ever? Do you still listen to the beguiling voice of a flattering world? Can you not yet bear the thought of giving up the fruits of iniquity? Let me here address you in the words of a faithful monitor, "Wretched soul! Hath thy sin proved so profitable a commodity, so necessary a companion, so delightful an employment, that thou canst not think of parting with it? May not God justly grant thee thy wishes, and seal thee a lease of thy distance from him, and nail thy ears to these doors of misery, and exclude thee eternally from his glory?"

4, The enjoyments of the world are uncertain

and transitory, while those of the believer are permanent.

What has been already said, of the unsatisfactory nature of all earthly things, might be sufficient to show the folly of seeking a portion in them. But could the worldling prove that he has in his present possessions a pleasure unmingled in kind, and exquisite in degree, how greatly would this consideration add to the anxiety of that precarious tenure by which they are all held. "Riches make to themselves wings, and flee away, as an eagle towards heaven." Fame, though it glitters at a distance, is but an empty bubble, which a slight touch destroys. "Mirth is justly likened to the crackling of thorns under a pot, a sudden blaze, soon lost in smoke and darkness." "The world," says the inspired writer, "passeth away, and the fashion thereof." How poor then is the best inheritance within the narrow limits of this terrestrial spot, and confined to a few uncertain moments of time! How strange, how unreasonable, how presumptuous is their conduct, who live and act as if present, fading objects, were stamped with the insurance of immortality, and future things were nothing but dreams and fables! How different will be their feelings, when the illusion

which has dazzled and tantalized the mind is removed by death! Severus, after having been raised from a humble station to the throne of the Roman empire, exclaimed, "I have been all things, and all things yield no profit." The late Lord Chesterfield was much noticed for his accomplishments, and addicted to all the flattering delights of a worldly life. "I have," says he, "enjoyed all the pleasures of this world, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which, in truth, is very low; whereas those, who have not experienced, always over-rate them. They only see their gay outside, and are dazzled with the glare, but I have been behind the scenes, I look upon all that has passed as one of those romantic dreams, which opium commonly occasions, and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose for the sake of the fugitive dream." Is this all that the world gives its votaries? Is this the end of their course, who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Surely, such examples of blasted designs and expectations, ought to check men from so eagerly grasping what they cannot keep, and adding new turrets to the fabric of ambition when the foundation shakes.

But the Christian enjoys a lasting happiness, He has "durable riches, a treasure which neither rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal." He possesses the honour that cometh from God, which remains unimpaired when the laurels of aspiring ambition are withered, and the dying echo of fame is heard no more. He has joys which never pall upon the taste, but continually heighten and improve. What the conscience fully allows, what the understanding for good reasons approves, and what the affections ardently embrace to the last, is bliss worthy of the name. As the believer grows in knowledge and experience, the glorious Redeemer becomes increasingly precious to him. The violent raging of the storm enhances the value of the refuge. While nature sinks, grace triumphs. The saint can testify at the hour of death, "No one good thing hath failed, of all that my God hath promised."

2. There is a striking contrast between the Christian and the unbeliever in their future conditions.

In what has been advanced, an appeal may be made to the result of experience; but in what follows, we must rely wholly on the Divine testimony. Never, while we are shut up within the walls of mortality, will the veil which hides

the eternal world be removed, to present in full view to our astonished souls the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell. Nor are we sure, if such a thing were permitted, that the feeble powers of human nature would be able to bear the impression. But though we have no opportunity actually to survey the regions of bliss or woe before we enter them, yet every thing is not involved in absolute uncertainty, nor does the Christian at last need to use the language that a modern poet hath put into the mouth of a dying heathen:—

"The wide, unbounded prospect lies before me,
But shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it."

Faith supplies the want of sight; and Divine truth sheds rays, which discover those grand and affecting scenes that could never otherwise have been known. It is the power of faith which embodies eternal things to the eye of the mind.

1. The future condition of the Christian will be a state of perfect rest, while that of the unbeliever will be a state of ceaseless torment.

The first idea of heavenly bliss, suggested by the Scriptures, is a total exemption from every kind and degree of evil, both moral and natural. "There remaineth a rest for the people

of God." In the celestial land of promise all is serenity and peace. There no roots of bitterness spring up to trouble, no storms of violence blow to annoy the blessed inhabitants. The triumphant Christian has rest from all his painful conflicts with sin. There will be no sighs and tears under the powerful workings of depravity in the heart; no vain thoughts and corrupt passions to disturb his delightful tranquillity; nothing that defileth can enter into the gates of the New Jerusalem. There the believer will have rest from all his pains and toils. It was the entrance of sin which at first let into the world disease, calamity, and death. It was the dreadful decree, the penal curse of God, that overspread the earth with barrenness, and doomed man to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. But in heaven there will be no craving, unsupplied wants, no fruitless or disappointed labours, no fainting languors, no piercing pangs, no gloomy, anxious days, or sleepless, wearisome nights. Not one of the inhabitants of that blessed world will say, "I am sick," for those that dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity. In heaven, the believer will rest from all his enemies. Ungodly men will no more shoot at him, in secret, their poisoned arrows, even bitter words; no entangling snares will be

spread by the workers of iniquity, no fires of persecution kindled by enmity and malice. There the wicked cease from troubling, there the weary are at rest. In a word, all the long train of miseries which accompany the whole course of mortal life, will be for ever excluded from those happy realms. Nor does this assertion rest on conjecture. "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them," Rev. xiv, 13.

But think of the ceaseless torments which await the unbeliever. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. While here, the despisers of religion may lull themselves into false security, crying "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Oh how will the shock of death chase away all their dreams! What rest can those find who are cast down to hell? What peace, when conscience, the never-dying worm, incessantly gnaws and devours the soul? What rest, where the fire of Divine wrath burns as a furnace, and shall not be quenched? Do we need to wonder that the

dark forebodings of such a state should sometimes sink the spirits, and shake the frames of the most bold and daring sinners? The bare description of what some have endured under these apprehensions makes the blood run chill. I was much affected with the account of the Honourable Francis Newport, who died in 1692. He was both an infidel and a profligate. In his last illness the horror of his mind became inexpressible. In nine days' time he was reduced from the most robust state of health to perfect weakness; during all which time, his language was the most dreadful that imagination can conceive. At one time, looking toward the fire, he said, "Oh! that I was to lie and broil upon that fire for a hundred thousand years, to purchase the favour of God, and be reconciled to him again! But it is a fruitless, vain wish: millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer the end of my tortures than one poor hour. O eternity! eternity! who can properly paraphrase upon the words for ever and ever?" In this state he died. Oh, who can bear the thought of wrath to come, the judgments of God, the last plagues! Oh, what a state, to be tormented day and night for ever! One would think, that the glimpses and forebodings of hell would fill conscious

sinners with the frenzy of Cain, the madness of Ahithophel, the trembling of Felix, and the despair of Judas. "To you, that are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe," 2 Thess. i, 7—10.

2. The future condition of the Christian will be a state of honour and glory; but that of the unbeliever a state of shame and confusion.

All who are renewed by Divine grace are called vessels of honour, sanctified, and made meet for their master's use. All true Christians turn away their eyes from beholding vanity, and seek for glory, honour, and immortality. These, as they are faithfully promised, shall be certainly given. Hence the future bliss of the saints is represented by the most magnificent images, such as palms, crowns, thrones, a paradise, a kingdom. O what triumphs are prepared for those who shall come off more than conquerors through him that hath loved them! What bright, un-

sullied beams of glory will burst upon the ransomed of the Lord in the resurrection morning! What an honour will it be to hear the gladdening invitation of the Saviour, "Come ye blessed of my Father!" Then shall the Lord wipe away every foul calumny, make the reproach of his people for ever to cease, and elevate them to stations of exalted dignity and eternal joy. Well might the apostle say, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Nor was he liable to an error in this calculation, or in the least afraid of having overrated the objects of his hope. It is true, in the present state, we can have but very feeble and indistinct ideas of that glory. Now, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known. Here we have but dim, twilight views; hereafter we shall have clear unbounded prospects. As a man, who had never seen the sun, could form but a poor idea of his splendour from the twinkling of a star, so the best means which we now possess enable us to comprehend but little of heavenly glory. It is but seldom that the reality of worldly grandeur equals the representations of report. But the glory to be revealed at the ap-

pearing of Jesus Christ will exceed, far exceed all description. We may multiply words, but the half cannot be told. Happy day! when these bodies shall be raised from the grave, and fashioned like unto his glorious body. Wondrous change! when mortality shall be swallowed up of life. Then shall the saints be joyful in glory.

But where shall the sinner and the ungodly appear? When the last trumpet shall sound, they must awake to shame and everlasting contempt. How glad would they be to escape, if it were possible, into the darkest corner of the universe, to shun the piercing eyes of the omniscient Judge. They will then, in vain, call for the rocks and mountains to cover them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. How will the lofty looks of man be humbled, and the haughtiness of man brought down, and the Lord alone exalted in that day! What confusion and horror will then cover the ungrateful, the unbelieving, the impenitent, the daring blasphemer, the beastly drunkard, the vile adulterer, the cruel oppressor, the sceptical mocker, the painted hypocrite! These will be speechless at the bar of an inflexible Judge. All the fine schemes of infidelity, all the vain excuses of negligence, and all the specious veils of dissimulation, will then

be swept away. Then, all who have lived and died incorrigible rebels against God, and enemies to Christ, must be clothed with shame, bound in fetters, and cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

3. The future condition of the Christian is a state of positive, unmixed, eternal felicity in the presence of God, and the highest order of created spirits; while the future doom of the unbeliever is a state of unmitigated and endless misery with the devil and his angels.

Heaven is not only an absolute freedom from sin, suffering, and every kind of danger, but also a state of positive and perfect happiness. I have before said, that words are inadequate to give a just and full description. Indeed, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath laid up for them that love him." The language of the sweet singer of Israel is so pleasing, that it ought not to be omitted here. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." To denote at once the purity, the plenitude, and the duration of the saints' future joy, our feeble conceptions are aided by comparisons drawn from many objects around us,

and yet in such a way as to prevent our attaching gross ideas to them. "And he showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." Rev. xxii, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. There is light without darkness; pure water, debased and poisoned with no dangerous ingredients; a tree of life, laden with abundant, never-failing fruit, but no tree of death. All there is purity and perfection.

But O, what will be the final portion of the wicked! Their misery will have no mitigation. The irrevocable decree has passed, which declares that they shall not see life. They are compelled to drink of the wine of the wrath of God,

which is poured, without mixture, into the cup of his indignation. He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour. If even a drop of water would allay, for a moment, the flames in which they must be tormented, it would not be granted. Those who have listened to the father of lies, rather than the God of truth, must share his terrible doom. Oh, dreadful state! to be shut up with impassable bars in the everlasting burnings of the bottomless pit! to have no companions but devils and condemned spirits; to hear nothing but shrieks of horror and groans of despair amidst the blackness of darkness for ever!

How different the exalted and thrice happy state of the saints. Every chosen vessel will be full of joy. All shall behold the unveiled glory of God, and adore him with seraphic transport. They will unceasingly triumph in the amazing and inexhaustible wonders of redeeming love. The song of the ransomed of the Lord will be, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

From the view which has been taken of the present consolations and future felicity of the

Christian, contrasted with the unhappy state
the wicked, may be seen, in its full force, t
truth of the apostle's words, "To you that l
lieve, Christ is precious."

I cannot close this little work without addre
ing myself in a few words more particularly,

1. To the unbeliever. I do not mean to dir
my aim to those who openly avow infidelity,
there is little probability, that such will look i
this book; but rather to those who vaguely
knowledge the Divine authority of the Gosp
without either feeling the force of its awful sa
tions, or experimentally enjoying its blessin
Alas! there are too many of this descripti
everywhere to be found. Are you, who n
read these lines, of the number? Perhaps y
mind has hitherto been quite void of serious
flection. You lie stupified and insensible ami
the lulling pleasures of sin, without the le
concern about the soul. I would call you, as
ship-master did Jonah, "What meanest th
O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, that th
perish not." Perhaps you presumptuously thi
yourself already a believer in Christ. Bew
of the danger of having a form of godline
without the power of it. Do not rest cont
with a dead faith, which can no more quick

and invigorate the soul, than a picture of fire can warm and revive the frozen limbs. Beware of listening to the specious pleas of self-righteousness, which disincline the heart to submit to the righteousness of God. Weigh seriously the design of God in giving us his revealed will. As the first and great command of the law requires of us to love God with supreme, unabated affection; so the first and chief command of the Gospel requires us fully to believe and honour the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only way of salvation. O consider the inevitable consequence of living and dying in impenitence and unbelief. The lying enemy may tell you, you shall not die; the busy scenes of the world may amuse you; some vague, unscriptural ideas of the mercy of God may buoy up your spirits. But set yourself to answer the solemn question, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Consider the deceitfulness of sin, and the emptiness and vanity of the world. O let the weighty and solemn warnings of God's word be laid to heart! Lend a willing ear to the sweet invitations of the glorious Gospel. There is but one refuge appointed to afford shelter from the storm; then hasten to it. The blood of Christ has virtue to cleanse, and the grace of Christ

has power to save all that come unto God by him. To whom then can you go, but to him, for eternal life?

2. I address a few words to the believer. O, Christian! you have been highly favoured of the Lord. He has taken from your hand the cup of trembling, and given you the cup of salvation; your privileges are of the highest order, of the greatest value. Redemption from the vilest slavery! deliverance from the plagues of hell! adoption into the family of God! union and communion with the Lord Jesus! the joy of the Holy Ghost! the bright hope of eternal glory! Ought not every feature to glow with smiles of complacency, and every heart-string to vibrate with emotions of gratitude? Ought not your mouth to be filled with his praise and his honour all the day long? O let Christ be magnified by you, both in life and in death. Let the rest of your time be devoted to the will of God. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you. Be diligent to add to your faith virtue; to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. And as you find by happy experience the pre-

ciousness of Christ, endeavour to spread, by all proper means, the influence of his Gospel; and when he who is your life shall appear, then shall you appear with him in glory.

THE END.

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